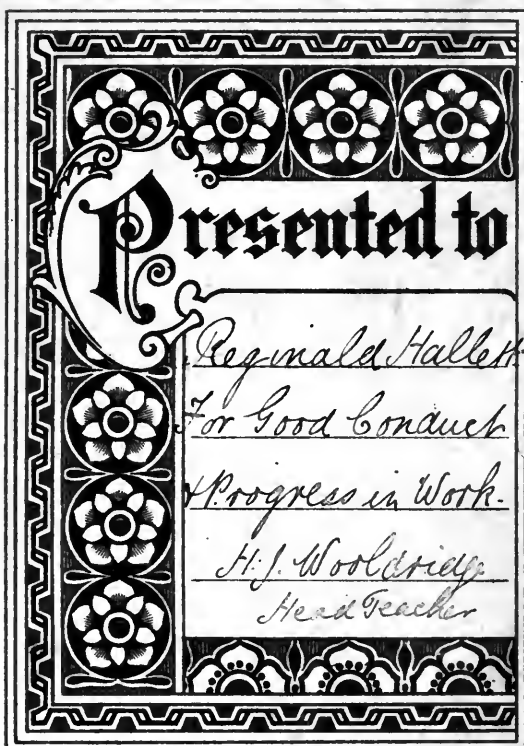


YOUNG HEADS ON OLD SHOULDERS



HUBERT C. TURNER
30 & 31, MARKET PLACE
READING

Carley School. 4
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"GIVE IT HIM!"

Page 14.

YOUNG HEADS ON OLD SHOULDERS.

BY

ASCOTT R. HOPE,

AUTHOR OF "A PECK OF TROUBLES," "THE YOUNG REBELS,"
"STORIES OF WHITMINSTER," ETC., ETC.

SIXTH THOUSAND.

LONDON:

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL UNION,

57 & 59, LUDGATE HILL, E.C.

2136142

ALL ABOUT

THE

WORLD



PREFACE.

THERE are a few good old-fashioned-looking stories under a title that needs a word of explanation. We have all heard of Feuds, Conspiracies, Injured Innocents, and so on ; and now, as in a puppet show, the performance is to consist of these well-worn plots, with the chief parts played by small actors, who will often be found laughing at us out of the corner of their eyes all the time that they are mimicking the lofty strut and tragic frown of their elders in fiction. The readers are expected to laugh, too, at the figure cut by these Young Heads on old Shoulders ; but when they have done laughing the writer hopes that he will have helped to put some kindly and sensible thoughts into the real heads that are still upon young shoulders.

A. R. H.





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THE FEUD.

A SNOWBALL STORY.





THE FEUD.

CHAPTER I.



AM an old fogey, and I regret the good old-fashioned winters. Not for myself, you will understand; to tell the truth, I begin to be somewhat wheezy and rheumatic, and I want no ice to slide on towards my grave.~ But I lament for the youth of my country, who seem nowadays to be too indulgently dealt with by our degenerate Decembers. I should like to know what is the good of being a boy if one has not the satisfaction of bidding defiance to stern nature, feeling one's spirits go up as the mercury goes down! For my part, I distrust any system of education which does not include a due proportion of chilblains and blue noses. It was so in my day, sir, and see what it made us! A dull old age, at all events, is that which they must look forward to who cannot have the delight of looking back on a time when, four weeks together, they never got up in the dark early mornings without finding the water frozen

in their basins, and never stirred out of doors without feeling it so cold that they were positively obliged to run about and work themselves into a glow of invigorating warmth and jovial mirth.

The winters must have changed since then—or is it I who lie longer in bed, sit oftener by a cosy fireside, and never venture forth without a thick overcoat and an umbrella? Surely the snow used to fall heavier and lie much longer on either side of our Christmases, which were, I affirm, a hundred times warmer and brighter than the dull holidays of this generation. My young nephew, who at the age of fourteen wears spectacles, attends scientific lectures, despises story books, and requires antibilious pills, admits the change, and explains it by a theory of his own. He has written a paper showing, as I understand, that the heat given out by our vast network of railways, not only from the engine fires, but from the friction over so many thousand miles of rail, radiating into the air, has a perceptible effect upon our climate. Be this as it may, it certainly appears to me that boys are not the same as they used to be. *These* boys have more useful information, more elevated tastes, more expensive games, more abundant pocket-money, and other doubtful advantages. *Those* seem to have had simpler ways, thicker skins, a larger capacity for pudding and pleasure, which were dealt out to them in smaller allowances, and greater readiness to make the best of circumstances and not to lose any chance

of fun which might be going. Perhaps if I saw the matter from the inside of a modern boy's jacket rather than from my present height of contemplation, I might judge differently, and approve the wisdom of the second example of the tenth rule of our Latin grammar, which declared, if I am not mistaken, that it is easier to find another climate than to change our nature. But without further speculation, I will get on to my story, merely remarking that a great many things have altered, for the better or the worse, since I was at school with Dr. O'Donnell at a small town in Yorkshire.

Everybody knows that schools in Yorkshire are, or were, as thick as the plums were *not* in our puddings. A friend of mine, who is a philologist, informs me that the Yorkshire dialect is peculiarly rich in phrases expressive of personal chastisement—a fact no doubt closely related to Mr. Squeers' connection with that country. There were two schools in this town, a classical and a commercial academy. The masters of them were Dr. O'Donnell and Mr. Macnab, respectively nicknamed Og and Gog by their irreverent flocks.

They were both big men, but here the resemblance ended. Dr. O'Donnell was stout, fair, and rubicund; Mr. Macnab was thin, dark, and of sallow complexion. Og was an Irishman and a Doctor of Divinity; Gog came from very far north and wrote himself Master of Arts. The one was a Tory and a Churchman, the other a Whig and a Dissenter. The doctor's temper

was hot and hasty; his rival had the reputation of being patient and sulky. The former—*infandum renovare dolorem*!—used the birch and made jokes; the latter kept a cane and was prone to lecturing. The bee and butterfly are not more unlike than were these instructors of youth.

As with the pedagogues so with the pupils. Ours was, of course, the superior establishment in our own opinion, which counted for much among us. We were understood to be receiving a “sound,” they a “practical,” education. Latin was our strong point; we had a boy in our school who, it was whispered, could write Latin hexameters all by himself, while their champion boasted of a contemptible skill in vulgar fractions. We went to church; most of them, I believe, to chapel. The Archdeacon gave away our prizes; the Mayor theirs. They had their pudding before meat; we rejoiced in ours—occasionally—in the proper place. We could beat them at cricket; they sometimes had the best of it at football. Most of our boys were boarders, most of theirs were day boys; and the antithesis was complete in many other respects for which, in these days of rapid reading, I cannot hope to gain attention.

These things being so, it will at once be evident to the merest schoolboy that what the Montagues were to the Capulets, the Mohawks to the Delawares, the MacDonalds to the Campbells, the Cavaliers to the Roundheads, the Platonists to the Aristotelians, the

Carthaginians to the Romans, the Blue party to the Yellow, the partisans of Tweedledum all the world over to the fanatics of Tweedledee, and the two factions who to this day divide my native village on the question of a new pump, to each other—that were we to the neighbouring school, and they to us, from one scholastic generation to another.

Thence arose, as may be imagined, many contests and skirmishes, not alone on the peaceful field of sport, but in bloodier and more bitter frays, with varying results. In my time the Ogs, as we called ourselves, had one great advantage over the Gogs, which often turned the tide of victory in our favour. They had more big boys, I think, but our head boy was himself a tower of strength. His name was Lamb—a name more than half belied by his nature and his tastes, which were decidedly martial. To his friends and the weak, indeed, he was gentle as a Quaker grandmother; but towards a defying foe he was a very Achilles of eagerness and ferocity. It followed that they regarded him with as much fear as we with affectionate admiration. Their chief captains and men of war had a standing challenge to come forth and do single combat with our champion, but sad experience had taught them to shrink from such an ordeal. The very name of Lamb was enough for them; they would scatter and fly at the cry that he was coming round the corner. Often he must have wished to be less redoubtable, for it was the struggle rather

than the triumph in which his spirit took delight; and since his soul was too noble to fight without cause or against an unworthy foe, there would be days and weeks together in which he would be like a stabled war-horse, pawing and champing for battle.

The frost and snow had come, and Lamb was in his element. To skim the frozen pond, to "make one long sliding of a holiday," these things were not unloved by him, but most of all dear to his amiably bellicose disposition were the mimic operations of a snow war. He was equally skilful to build forts of snow and daring to head some desperate charge through a volley of balls. One of our boys, who was a great reader, prophesied that Lamb would turn out a second Napoleon and alter the face of Europe. Nothing of the kind; he became a doctor at Sheffield, and has a great reputation in nursery practice.

Well, one morning when we got up in the dark, and ran out to warm our shivering little selves before going into school, we were horrified to find that salt had been sprinkled on our slides. What enemy had done this? Not the doctor or his myrmidons; he had his faults, but was as wholly incapable of such an act as any other sound divine in the kingdom. We were not long left in doubt. A trail of footsteps in the snow led right to the other school. And if this indication were not enough, there were certain chalk-marks on the wall, expressive of exultation and derision; in these we recognised the *totems* of the tribe of Gog.

Great was our indignation, loud were our demands of vengeance. It was proposed that we should waylay the Gog day boys going singly or in small parties to school, and exact a tenfold retribution on their puny persons. But Lamb was too chivalrous for such warfare. He vowed that though they were not ashamed to make sneaking forays by night, no Gog should suffer harm from us till they were gathered together, with due warning of our intentions, and every opportunity of defending themselves.

One small boy on his way to the other school our captain ordered to be captured, but not a hair of his head was to be hurt. When this prisoner was led trembling into Lamb's presence, he delivered to him an enormous snowball, wrapped in a sheet of brown paper. This he was charged to convey to the heads of his own people, who, without further ceremony, could not fail to receive it as a declaration of war.

I need not say how impatiently we went through our morning lessons, or how eagerly we swallowed down our breakfast. The word had been handed round that at the very first available moment, Lamb was to lead us against the foe. When at last we were free to assemble in the playground, the utmost enthusiasm prevailed. Every boy of us was eager for the attack, or, if he had not this virtue, was fain to assume it. When the doughty Lamb took the war path, none dared linger at home.

Our leader was a man of deeds rather than words ;

indeed, there was no time for speeches. We had not three-quarters of an hour clear, and in three minutes we were on the march for the scene of action, a tumultuous but determined band.

The Gog institution stood just outside of the town, its playground bordering the high road. We had expected to find scouts posted to give warning of our approach, but no : a reconnoitring party thrown out in advance reported them to be disporting themselves in confidence and security. At the last turn of the road we were halted and received a few final directions from our general. Then we moved on cautiously, stooping under the wall so as not to be seen till the moment of attack, and each warrior hastily providing himself as he went with as many snowballs as he could carry in his arms.

In spite of our warning, the Gogs were off their guard. We could see them scattered over their playground, some sliding, some playing leap-frog, some poor creatures moving about with their hands in their pockets to keep them warm. The first notice they had of our approach was a tremendous cheer ; then from behind the wall we started up into view, and a volley of snowballs was poured in upon them. Taken by surprise, their impulse was to run. Lamb, leading the forlorn hope, flew to the gate. Through this, or bounding over the low wall, we rushed into their playground with our terrible war-whoop, and half the field was in our hands before they had fired a shot.

But soon some of their big fellows came hurrying up to check our onset, and the rest, recovering from their surprise, flocked round their leaders and began to defend themselves. Sing, Muse, the varying fortunes of the field, where now in battle closed the adverse lines! Loud rose the martial cries of either band. Fast flew the snowballs, whitening all the air. Unheeded moaned the timid, they who slunk to the safe rear, pretending to be hurt. With hand and voice each warrior fiercely strove; defiance answering triumph, as the fray waxed hot and hotter, and the swaying ranks charged but to waver, yielded to return. Thus, for a little space, the battle raged, and victory, hovering o'er the doubtful scene, now to this side inclined, and now to that.

But not long did the issue hang thus in suspense. The advantage which we had gained at first, inspired us with courage, and we pressed with irresistible ardour on the faltering ranks of the foe. They give ground, they move back; the movement becomes a retreat, the retreat quickens into a run, and we are at their heels, turning it into a rout. Nor is this all. Lamb, who has been fighting in the thick of the fray, dashing up to the very ranks of the enemy, and disdaining to hurl his unerring missile till he can see the whites of their eyes, is not for all his valour forgetful of cunning strategy. With six or seven chosen braves, he has been creeping to our right wing, and now rushes on impetuously, out-flanking the enemy's left, and cutting them off from their schoolhouse, in

which they would fain take refuge. Panic-stricken, they heed not what they do, but, like a flock of silly sheep, turn their headlong course, and skurry across to the opposite corner of the playground, with not a moment's time for consideration, till they are brought up by the high wall, and breathlessly turn to bay.

What! oh, what have they done? Huddled into their fives-court, they find us closing round them in a joyfully shouting semicircle. Their new position is all slides and hard-beaten snow; they have scarcely any ammunition, and can only return a rare and random shot at our warriors leaping free in the open, who hurl snowballs as fast as they can make them, and every shot tells on the helpless crowd penned up between the three walls of the court. Once and again they attempt to break out, but in vain. Our fire redoubles; the boldest of them tries to shrink back; they struggle and press and hold craven hands before their faces, and bend their heads under the merciless fire which we pour in upon them from every side. Thus, in five minutes, have we made ourselves masters of the scene, and the proud foe is beleaguered, blockaded, and bombarded to the utmost point of despair.

The bravest hearts among them cannot hold out against such a reverse of fortune. Five more minutes have not passed before they demand a parley. They declare that they must go to school, and sue for quarter.

The word is given to cease firing, and the conditions

of surrender are entered upon. But during the armistice we busy ourselves in preparing a battery of snowballs, for use at the first sign of renewed hostility.

Such a victory justified severe terms. Lamb required of the enemy that they should surrender at discretion. We were then to form into two lines, down which they were to pass one by one, and be pelted to our hearts' content. Their leader's honour must be pledged that the besieged force would march out in this and no other way. Two minutes were given them for reflection; at the end of that time our batteries would reopen.

Naturally, the Gogs hesitated to accept these proposals, granting them as little of the honours of war as fell to the lot of the Roman army at the Caudine Forks. But while they were consulting, and, urged by the straitness of their predicament and the relentlessness of our preparations, were perhaps about to yield to their ignominious fate, our own rashness undid the success which we had won, and at the very moment of triumph wrested the prize from our too eager grasp.

Beyond one wall of the playground was a walk leading to the private entrance of Mr. Macnab's house, and in the middle of the wall a barred gate communicated with this walk. Along the top of the wall was now seen slowly and steadily moving, a high hat worn by a tall man, and some foolish urchin was moved to exclaim, "*Here's Gog himself!*"

Flushed with easy conquest, we were in no mood for consideration. "*Give it him!*" was the cry, and a score of us took good aim at the opening made by the gate. Then, the instant that the wearer of the hat presented himself, a cloud of snowballs flew through the air and burst on and around the head of the amazed pedagogue. Checked in his stately stride, he staggered and toppled down, throwing out his arms in vain, and reaching wildly after his dislodged beaver. Roars of laughter from both sides greeted his downfall, and we laughed loudest, thinking we had nought to fear from his vengeance. But when he picked himself up, shook off the snow by which his black garments were plentifully bespattered, and turned his red and wrathful countenance upon us, lo! it was Dr. O'Donnell.

It was our turn to quail. One small and heedless boy, still too excited to see the fact of the case, hurled a snowball with so true an aim that it hit our venerable preceptor full in the face and dismounted his spectacles. But the rest of us were overwhelmed by contrition and alarm. We stayed our sacrilegious hands, the snowballs with which we were about to rake the gateway dropped to the ground, and we stood not knowing where to look, and looking anywhere but in the face of our outraged and irate master. Not long had we to stand this ordeal. Shaking his stick at us, and muttering certain words, which we heard not but guessed their purport only too well, he disappeared and went on his way without further molestation.

And this was the time which our enemies chose to make a sudden rush forward, basely taking advantage of our abashment and confusion. Before we could brace our spirits anew to the battle, they had broken our lines, driven us right and left, captured our magazines of ammunition, and thus in a few seconds the tide was turned, and we fled pell-mell before our lately despairing prisoners.

Twice, thrice, we rallied and made a short stand, while Lamb fought desperately at every point of the battle, and was a host in himself. The last to retreat, and the first to return to the charge, more than once, like a second Horatius, he stood singly against the advancing foe, and by his sole prowess held back the pursuit. But when we saw him in the enemy's hands, borne down by a rush, surrounded with yells of savage joy, rolled ignominiously on the ground, and rubbed in the face with snow, then our hearts fairly failed us. A faint attempt we made to rescue our leader, but as his captors came on with fresh fury, a panic seized us, and we fled from the field. Nor did we halt now, till we had run forth into the road and were out of fire. Lamb came bounding after us, his face glowing like a red-hot coal, his eyes shining with indignation, his cap lost, and his tawny mane, all wet with snow, streaming in the wind, his voice raised in reproof, entreaty, exhortation. It was too late. Our forces were already melting away. There was nothing for it but to set our faces towards home, and confess our defeat.



CHAPTER II.

IT was, indeed, time to be returning to school. We had already got too far wrong with our master to be able to afford giving him fresh cause of displeasure by being late. Dominies were dominies in these days, and by no means to be offended with impunity. If we had been victorious in the recent encounter, we might have made lighter of his wrath; but, in the depression of defeat, we were fain to consider with some anxiety what would now befall us in a contest where all the blows would be on one side. A few short minutes had changed us from lions into most tail-drooping lambs.

We heard the school-bell, and quickened our reluctant steps. As soon as we entered the schoolroom we saw signs to justify our fears. The Doctor, generally the last to appear upon the scholastic scene, was already seated on his lofty chair, and one glance showed his storm-compelling brow darkened by an

ominous cloud. He had not opened his desk ; no pile of books was laid before him, nor did he address himself to mending a mighty pen, the usual preliminaries of beginning work. It was painfully evident that the proceedings were to be of a special character. The mind of the boldest was moved, and the knees of the timid shook beneath them. All eyes were fixed on a little closet behind the Doctor's chair. When that dread receptacle should be opened, full well we knew what blasts of dread and doom were let loose. *The key was in the door.* As if that key had been inserted at the nape of the neck and slid downwards with cold and gruesome touch along the spine, such was the shudder which the very sight of it sent through every guilty beholder.

There was no need to command silence. We took our places with unwonted sedateness, and when the Doctor's heavy knuckles rapped on the desk, such a hush ensued as if the curtain was being drawn up for the last scene of some familiar tragedy. Our preceptor's stentorian voice rolled out upon ears which could have caught his slightest whisper. Like a classical scholar that he was, he plunged right in the middle of his tale, according to the Horatian maxim.

"Boys," he exclaimed, sternly frowning, "I have been grossly insulted !"

What a sight were our faces ! Some tried to affect surprise, even incredulity. Some were seen struggling with a faint smile, which faded into preternatural

solemnity as they thought the Doctor's awful eye rested upon them. Some preserved looks of stolid immobility, and seemed to desire that he would come to business at once and have done with it. Some were in a too evident state of apprehension.

When he had paused a moment to let this announcement sink duly into our minds, the Doctor went majestically on, with a thump upon the desk that made half of us jump in our creeping skins.

"This morning I was going to call on Mr. Macnab, for the purpose of complaining of an outrage, which, as you are aware, was last night perpetrated upon my premises by the pupils of his establishment. You are all acquainted with the matter to which I allude."

Having proceeded thus far in measured tones, the Doctor looked round to observe the effect of this communication. We were all much interested—alas! only too much interested—but well we knew that the point was yet to come, and felt as uncomfortable as a mouse no doubt does while a cruel cat is playing with its helpless agonies and delaying the fatal moment of execution.

"While on the way to Mr. Macnab's house," continued the Doctor, raising his voice and drawing himself up, as if calling heaven and earth to witness that such things were, "I was—I was attacked by a mob of rude boys! I was pelted with snowballs! My hat was knocked off—my glasses were broken! It is a mercy that no worse injury followed this most unseemly be-

haviour. I never was so treated before in all my life!" declared the Doctor, and we could well believe him, for it had never entered our heads to conceive of him as a boy, without dignity, learning, a white necktie, and an enormous shirt collar. He must have been born above all the rude accidents of human existence.

At each statement of his injuries he made a full stop, which fell like a blow upon our consciences. Already I, for one, began to feel a tingling anticipation of what might come next. Even Lamb's face wore a shade of serious anxiety. The climax was approaching.

"Do you know who these boys were?"

We modestly looked down.

"This is not by any means the first time that I have been insulted by Mr. Macnab's pupils."

We quickly looked up.

"Complaint in the proper quarter is useless, as I have learned by experience. Therefore I have determined to appeal to you to vindicate the honour of your school, and the respect due to your master."

We opened our eyes.

"I leave it to you, then, to chastise the presumption and impertinence of these fellows. If it's snowballs they want, give them snowballs to their hearts' content. Pelt them, drive them out of your sight, teach them to interfere with us at their peril."

We opened our mouths.

"For this purpose," said the Doctor, speaking with more deliberation than ever, "I have resolved to—"

he looked round and held us in suspense—"to give you a holiday."

We burst into cheers, and under cover of the cheers rose shouts of laughter from those who saw the mistake which our master had made, and of glee from those who, not quite understanding how it was, yet rejoiced at the unexpected and undeserved result of his indignation. A holiday gained in such a manner came with a double relish, and fears dissipated in such a form left a double sense of relief. We felt as a mariner might feel, who, just escaped from shipwreck, had come suddenly upon a treasure. I fear none of us reflected in our surprise that we were not acting quite fairly in allowing the Doctor to remain under his delusion. We were all eager to be off. And our master, touched by our outburst of enthusiasm and affection, as he thought it, relaxed his brow, and dismissed us with a jovial smile, relapsing, as at such moments he was apt to do, into his native accent.

"Off with ye! And don't be after hurting any of these fellows more than ye can help, but just give them a hint that they had better not meddle with your slides or your master again. Make the best of the day, my boys, for it's all your own!"

Away we ran, giving three cheers for the Doctor, and quickly, with new courage, we hastened back towards the strongholds of Gog.

"Now they shan't have the best of it!" vowed Lamb, bounding onwards like a hungry lion.

But now we found the enemy safe behind their walls. Their master kept them mewed up in school all the forenoon. How they must have chafed as they heard our shouts of derision and defiance beneath the windows, and were not suffered to come forth to the stirring encounter, but, chained to the weary desk, must slave with numbed fingers at the miserable art of ornamental handwriting, and strive to fix their wandering wits on the loathsome problems of compound proportion !

We remained scouting round their premises for some time. Once only it seemed that our challenge was about to be accepted. The door of the schoolroom opened, and Mr. Macnab sallied forth in person, to be speedily driven back by a volley of snowballs and not to reappear. We were almost as tickled by the joke of pelting the other boys' master as we were by the results of our unnatural onslaught upon our own. But when no further notice was taken of us we gave up the siege, and went off to amuse ourselves as best we could by our own devices, and in this you may be sure we had no difficulty.

After dinner, and it was roast beef day, the Doctor had some more good news for us. He had been to look at a large pond not far from the town, and finding that the ice would bear, proposed to take us there for an afternoon's skating. This was more excellent sport than the other. Mirthfully we slung our skates over our shoulders, and set forth, the

Doctor stalking before us in that high good-humour which with him always followed an outburst of wrath, as surely as fine weather comes at the heel of a Whitsunday storm.

We had arrived in sight of the pond, when we beheld a like procession advancing from an opposite direction. It was the boys of the other school, headed by their master. Both parties reached the banks of the pond at the same time, and we made towards each other, like two bands of gallant knights bent on meeting midway in these icy lists. And as Sir Lancelot and the mighty Knight of the Red Lawns might have towered above the press, so strode our learned leaders, a head and shoulders over the tallest of their following tail. Or rather, like "some great admiral" did each of them lead into the fight, for some instinct told us that a combat of words at least was now at hand, and the boldest held his tongue and sailed silent towards that strange encounter. Were Og and Gog going to fall foul of each other? If so, we did not doubt that our flagship would prove to carry the heavier metal.

As soon as they bore down within hailing distance, the two armaments, following the motions of their leaders, heaved to, and formed into confronting lines, with the commanders anchored broadside to broadside in the space between. Like courteous antagonists they saluted each other, while we stood at quarters, so to speak, with decks cleared for action and





ready to obey signals. Then Gog fired the first gun.

"Good-morning, Dr. O'Donnell! I am glad I have met you, sir. I had proposed to wait upon you to complain of the conduct of your boys."

"Indeed, sir! I fancied that I had some reason to make a similar complaint to you."

"Are you aware, sir, that your boys invaded my playground this morning, and attacked my pupils as they were peacefully amusing themselves there?"

"Well, well, boys will be boys," said the Doctor, smiling pleasantly, and helping himself to a pinch of snuff.

"They rolled in the snow two small boys who had colds in the head! They interrupted our work in school to such an extent that the morning was as good as wasted! They cracked two panes of glass in my windows! Is this the conduct of young gentlemen?"

"Aye, aye," said the Doctor, inwardly chuckling, but outwardly trying to look a little—a very little—concerned as he politely handed his snuff-box to the other dominie. "I am sorry if they have done any mischief: but you know, when there is a good fall of snow, one winks at a little fun. *My* boys are so industrious most days of the year, that *I* cannot grudge them a harmless prank now and then."

"They threw snowballs at *me*, sir! Surely this is a more serious matter than you seem to consider it?"

"Come, Mr. Macnab," said the Doctor, in his blindest style, "we have been young ourselves once, and we know that the high spirits of youth will sometimes trifle with our dignity. Surely we can afford to smile at it for once in a way?"

This honeyed speech had gall in it, for Dr. Og seemed to imply that while his own dignity was above question, his rival had not much of that article to come and go upon. At least Mr. Macnab understood him in some such sense, for he raised his voice and exclaimed with increasing heat—

"Well, sir, you may like to be insulted and snowballed by your pupils!"

"My pupils have too much respect for me to do anything of the kind," quoth our doctor benignantly, looking round on us, as if for a response to this sentiment, which of course was not forthcoming.

"Why, sir, didn't I see them with my own eyes? Not content with attacking my boys and driving them out of their playground, I saw them assault you as you were coming to my house, to concert measures, as I was weak enough to suppose, for suppressing this lawlessness and quarrelling. I saw you almost knocked down by the snowballs which your own boys hurled at you, and fearing you might be seriously injured, I was on the point of rushing out of the house to offer you my services. I am heartily glad, sir, that you are none the worse for the treatment you received on my premises, and if you are quite satisfied

with what happened, I am none the less thankful to say that my boys had no hand in it."

"What is this?" faltered the Doctor, regarding us with astonishment and severity, while a new light dawned upon him as he saw the conscious guilt of some faces, and the scarcely repressed laughter on others.

"Is it possible that you are ignorant of your assailants? There is the ringleader!" declared Mr. Macnab, pointing out Lamb.

"Lamb!" said Dr. O'Donnell in his most awful voice. "What do I hear? Explain—give me the truth, sir! Have I been disgracefully insulted as a preliminary to being grossly deceived? Speak, sir."

But poor Lamb at the best of times was, like some other heroes of history, no less unready of speech than he was prompt in action. He was better at bearing punishment than at making excuses. And now, when he would fain have told a soothing tale and deprecated the rising ire of our preceptor, as might well have been done and with honesty, he found himself able only to stammer and blunder and bluntly confess in a way which put the worst instead of the best aspect on what had happened. The Doctor heard and stood struggling with unutterable thoughts, till his feelings found vent in a portentous "Go, sir!"

"Come, Dr. O'Donnell," said the other master with malicious civility, "don't be too hard on them. Boys will be boys, we all know."

What a dreadful moment for us! And, worst of all, the other boys were visibly sniggering over our sad discomfiture.

"We were young ourselves once," suggested that dreadful Macnab. "We can afford to smile at these pranks—when they don't go too far."

"This is intolerable! This is scandalous!" muttered the Doctor, still trying to keep his wrath from public outburst; then in a voice whose tones were pregnant with dire meaning, he ordered us to go home forthwith and await his arrival in the schoolroom.

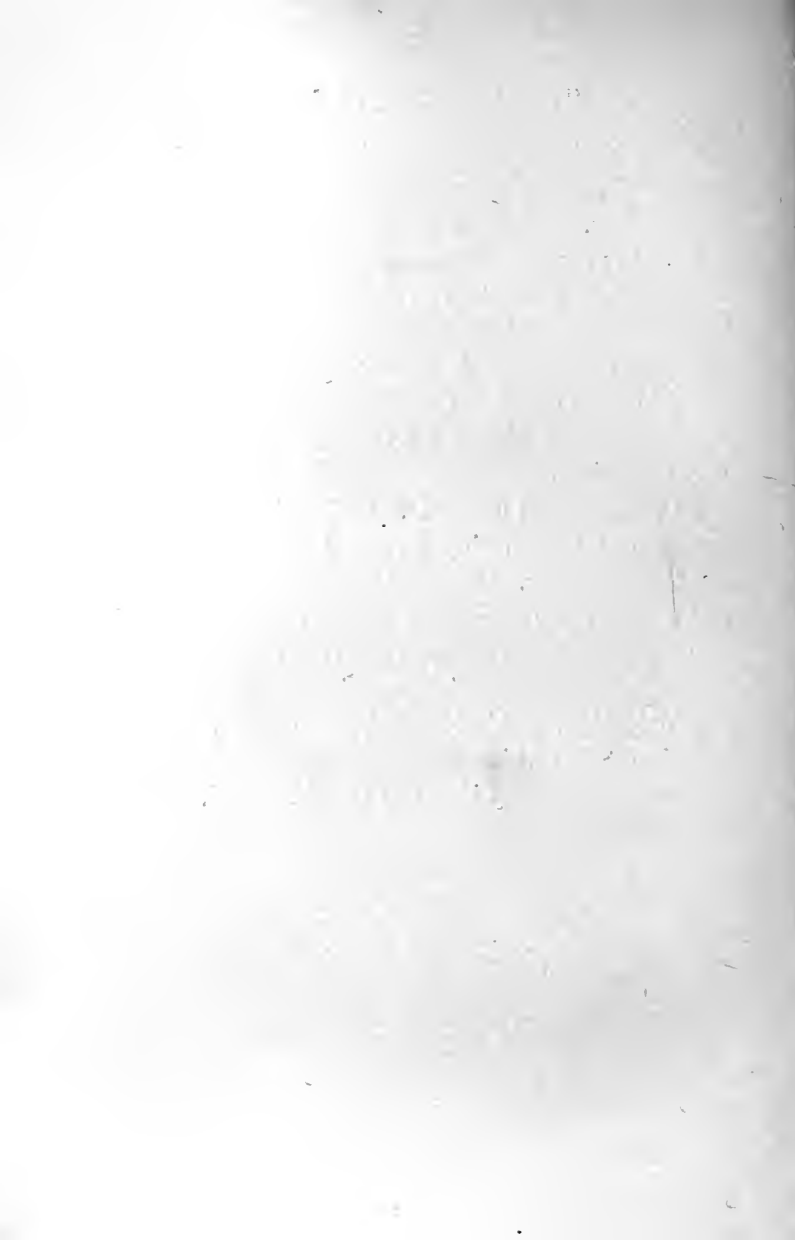
We slunk off downcast beneath the grins of Gog, leaving our master in close and far from friendly confabulation with theirs. Ah! we were now about to pay the price of that brief triumph. We might have known that the truth would leak out sooner or later. But in spite of our humiliation and of our danger, we could not but laugh as we recalled the scene which had just passed before our eyes. Thus with mixed emotions we came back to the school and awaited the Doctor's return.

When he came, the laughing was at an end. Here however, the curtain must be dropped, for like the old tragedians, I do not choose to enact scenes of horror upon the open stage. Suffice it to say that before the sun had set there was a certain soreness in the feelings with which some of us looked back to the events of the day, and all of us had reason to vow vengeance more than ever against the rival school.

But a boy's will, we know, is the wind's will, and our ill-will; in this case, was specially at the mercy of the weather. Through the night came a rapid thaw, and in the morning there was no snow wherewith to mark our sense of injury and to wreak our wrath upon the enemy. Besides, as we learned, our master had informed theirs of their clever trick of getting out at night to spoil our slides, and the result was that they were punished by being shut up and kept out of our way for a time.

So when we did meet, it was with kindlier feelings, community of suffering having bred in us an unwonted sympathy. We made peace for the moment, and ascribed our joint misfortunes to the cause of so many woes since the days of Troy: *quicquid reges delirant, plectuntur Achivi*; that is to say, when rulers fall out, their subjects are apt to pay the piper. This is a thing which could not happen nowadays of course, but my story is one of the old school.





THE CONSPIRACY.

A CHAPTER OF SCHOOLBOY HISTORY.





THE CONSPIRACY.



IT is thirty years since I was a small pupil at a Cheltenham boarding-school, kept by a certain Mr. Monk. My school days there seem now, so far as I can recollect, to have been uneventful enough; but there was one episode in our history which will, perhaps, be found worth relating.

Mr. Monk's boys were chiefly little fellows; there were, however, two rather bigger and older than the rest, who took the lead in most things. These two, Collins and Biggs by name, were very different in character, though they drew pretty well together, as became their position as the aristocracy of our little community. Collins was a dull, heavy boy, who, being left an orphan, poor fellow! at a very early age, had lived almost always at various schools, and had been longer at ours than most of us, so that he had become learned, if in nothing else, in the customs and tradi-

tions of school life, and was looked up to by us not only with dread for his rough, domineering propensities, but with unfeigned respect, such as we thought due to a boy who had seen so much of the juvenile world, and was so experienced in all things boyish ; his word was law as to the rules of any game, or in deciding upon any point of schoolboy honour. Biggs, on the other hand, was a youth of a more amiable disposition, and of greater talents and accomplishments. Though he was not such a hero as Collins in our eyes, we took pride in him as being no ordinary boy. He was no great favourite with Mr. Monk, being, indeed, rather given to idling and dreaming over his work, but he was undoubtedly clever. He took the first prize for history. He was understood to have written poetry. He read a great deal, and used finer words than the rest of us : "long-nibbed" words, that was what we used to call them. He was of a decidedly sentimental and imaginative turn of mind, as we had reason to know to our cost, when the first class were put into a Latin book containing lives of the great men of antiquity. Then Biggs was seized with a violent taste for the spirit of ancient history. He had no sooner studied the life of Lysurgus, than nothing would serve him but turning the whole of us into a set of young Spartans. He incited us to run pins into our legs, and drop hot sealing-wax on our arms, that we might learn to bear pain without calling out. Collins joined him readily in this, taking what

may be called an active rather than a passive part in Spartan discipline, which, in his hands, became nothing but a kind of rough bullying, with a slight veil of sentiment thrown over it; but Biggs was too sincere in his enthusiasm to inflict any tortures on others which he did not bear cheerfully himself. At first some of us were not altogether averse to this strange diversion, congenial, in some degree, to the schoolboy mind; but we soon found that it was being pushed too far, and thought the Spartan boys must have had a bad time of it. And when Biggs and Collins openly spoke of setting up an altar of Diana, at which we were to be invited to test our fortitude at a competitive ordeal of stripes, our dissatisfaction with the institutions of ancient history might have been very clearly shown, if fortune had not, about this time, given a new turn to Biggs' classical tastes.

There was a spirit of discontent abroad in our school; such a spirit will occasionally creep into even the best regulated establishment, as unexpectedly, and with as little apparent cause or cure as an east wind or a thick fog. I believe the main reason in our case was that we had nothing particular to do in our playtime. Football was just over; cricket had not yet begun; and that year, as it so happened, no game came into fashion to occupy our energies in the interval, so we had time for grumbling. We had grievances, too, undoubted grievances, to grumble about. Mr. Monk had recently added an hour to the school-

time of the elder boys, an hour gained by getting up earlier, now that the long dark nights were over. Moreover, he made us go to bed sooner, and stopped our frugal supper, the slices of bread and cheese that it had been the custom to serve out to each boy — on some frivolous pretext of suppers being unwholesome, forsooth. We knew better ; it was nothing but stinginess, and Collins did not scruple to denounce our master as dishonest. Some boys went the length of writing home on the subject, and suggested in vain that they should be taken away from such a school.

But perhaps the most galling grievance was one for which Miss Sickles was to blame. Miss Sickles—"Icicles" we called her—was the housekeeper, who, our master being a bachelor, had great power in the establishment, and used it in a high-handed manner ; it was whispered that even Mr. Monk himself stood in awe of her. Miss Sickles had a great regard for neatness and order ; our notions of these matters did not square with hers, hence arose many troubles and disagreements, in which the younger boys invariably got the worst of it in dealing with Miss Sickles, and the elder ones did not always come off best. Utterly regardless of our feelings and our customs, she had recently procured the enactment of a decree that she should be allowed to inflict small fines upon boys who spoiled their clothes, or neglected to take a bath regularly, or came to dinner without brushing their hair. It was easy for her to carry out this kind of discipline,

for she had the distribution of our pocket-money in her hands, and never failed to deduct the fine whenever any of her rules were broken. This roused our utmost indignation. To be obliged to obey a woman, and to have our pocket-money taken from us, this was wounding boys and Britons in their most sensitive points. I fear we became as rude and troublesome as we could to Miss Sickles. Among the elder boys it was a point of honour to set her wishes at nought. Then the housekeeper called in the aid of Mr. Monk, and the dispute became a sore point in more senses than one. The power of the law was too much for us, however ; we were forced to submit sullenly, and our discontent grew from day to day. Biggs declared that the thirty tyrants of Athens were nothing to Miss Sickles. We all agreed with him, having a very vague notion as to the oppressive power of the said tyrants, and we enthusiastically applauded when with great spirit he spouted out of our school reading-book several stirring poetical sentiments, such as—

“ Slaves cannot breathe in England ; if their lungs
Receive our air, that moment they are free ;
They touch our country, and their shackles fall.”

I don't know who it was that first suggested the idea of armed resistance to these unpopular measures. I am telling of the year when Louis Philippe was driven from his throne, and there was a political storm in the air of every European capital. Our quiet school at Cheltenham did not wholly escape this disturbing in-

fluence; we took in a newspaper, and read with eager interest about barricades, insurrections, constitutions, secret societies, chartist meetings, and the like. Then it occurred to some of the most daring of us that if kings and emperors could be made to tremble for their crowns, even Mr. Monk and Miss Sickles might prove not invulnerable.

If Biggs and Collins were not the proposers of a revolt, they readily fell in with the notion, and gave all the weight of their experience and authority to organising it. Collins was a revolutionist, "desirous of new things," as the Latin phrase has it, because his credit was so bad with the authorities, and so many black marks were set down against him, that he had nothing to lose by taking a prominent part in such a movement. Biggs was no less eager; he had just got into the story of the Tarquins, and was filled with a fervent admiration for liberty, and tickled with the idea of playing the part of Brutus, Tell, and Garibaldi all at once. Through his influence, we took the important step of forming ourselves at once into a republic, upon the Roman model. Biggs and Collins were, of course, elected consuls with dictatorial power. The next office filled up, and the most sought after, was that of Master of the Horse. All the boys of the first class envied this dignity, and to save disputes we made six masters of the horse, and six lictors, who were to carry sticks and inflict punishments, so that this latter office was also much run after. The other

magistrates, prætors, ædiles, tribunes, and censors were appointed more sparingly; and when all these posts were filled, there remained some half a dozen small boys, who, that in a private capacity they might not have cause for dissatisfaction, were named decemvirs, and took great pride in the honour conferred upon them. So our forces were formed somewhat on the model of that potentate's who

“—swore a feud against the clan MacTavish,
And marched into their land to plunder and to ravish,
For he did resolve to extirpate the vipers,
With four-and-twenty men and five-and-thirty pipers!”

The republic being thus constituted, it was inaugurated by all the boys walking in procession round the playground with bare legs and arms—it had been proposed, indeed, that the consuls should wear paper cocked hats and top-boots, but Biggs, true to republican simplicity, declined all such marks of distinction, and Collins thrashed one of the prætors who had the presumption to insist on putting a feather in his cap. In the evening we celebrated our declaration of independence by a grand banquet in our bedrooms, which, for want of funds to provide better, consisted chiefly of toffee and gingerbread—excellent things in their way, but rather apt to make a mess of clean sheets, as one or two ardent sons of liberty found to their cost, when they got into trouble with Miss Sickles in consequence. The fear of Miss Sickles, Biggs finely said, was the sword of Damocles, hanging always over our midnight feasts.

All this delighted Biggs beyond measure. If left to himself, he would have gone no further, but his unromantic colleague looked upon such proceedings as mere useless tomfoolery, and kept urging us to action. It was easier, however, to talk of conspiring than to find any active form which our conspiracy might conveniently take. Biggs read to us, out of his Latin book, a story of a certain Roman general, who, when a wicked schoolmaster offered to betray the children of his enemies into his power, ordered the treacherous pedagogue's hands to be bound behind him, and that he should be beaten back into the city by his own pupils—I think this was the story, but my classics are a little rusty by this time, and I may have told it wrongly. Anyhow, this seemed to Collins an example worthy of being imitated, but unfortunately no person was likely to appear to play for us the part of the Roman general, or Mr. Monk would have been most unwise to drum such notions into the heads of his pupils as he did with so much labour. It was lucky for him that, while the histories of Greece and Rome contain a great deal of very revolutionary sentiment, they are wanting in what may be called practical suggestions adapted to the means of youthful malcontents. Biggs certainly made a great point of us all taking a solemn oath of secrecy, as a preliminary to further action; Collins, however, declared that this was quite unnecessary, and that he would punch the head of any boy who should breathe a word of

our intentions to the government. “We must take them by surprise,” both Collins and Biggs said, and the necessity of this was too evident to be contradicted.

Up to this point, it will be plain, most of the conspirators had a very vague idea of what they meant to be at. Some of us went into it all as a piece of fun ; others, like Biggs, had no serious intention of going beyond a harmless demonstration. But now Collins began to talk boldly of a *barring out*. He professed to be well versed in the history of such undertakings, which, according to him, always ended successfully. He had seen in the flesh and spoken with boys who had taken part in barrings out, and we listened with reverence and kindling spirit to his legends of the humiliation of schoolmasters, and the triumph of oppressed scholars. Indeed, after a time, he got the length of giving us to understand that he himself had played a prominent part in more than one movement of the kind. He could tell us exactly how to set about it ; he would lead us on to victory ; there could be no fear of disaster if we only stuck to one another. Biggs, also, grew more and more daring in his imaginations. He took to writing *Down with the tyrant!* all over the playground in red chalk ; he spoke scornfully of Mr. Monk as “Tarquin,” and more than hinted that he would be found ready to meet him in single combat when the moment of action came. The rest of us, fired with contagious ardour, gave what aid we could to the preparations for

revolt. We laid by the best part of our pocket-money to supply provisions. We secreted arms in our play-boxes, rulers, hockey-sticks, catapults, stones, and bullets. Some boys bought squibs and crackers ; one had a pistol, which Collins insisted on taking possession of in the public interest, and it was agreed that he would be likely to make the best use of it. For my part I was luckily able to contribute a dark lantern to the common weal, and this was admitted on all hands to be a most valuable acquisition ; nothing could be more necessary to a conspiracy, we thought, with a confused reminiscence of Guy Fawkes.

Thus did we drift into an undertaking, of which few of us had realised the seriousness, when one morning we were astonished by a declaration from Collins and Biggs, that the plan of revolt was now fully determined upon, and that very evening fixed for its execution. This certainly seemed rather precipitate, but the fact was that an event had occurred that morning which goaded Biggs' revolutionary disposition into desperate action. Coming in rather late to breakfast, as he often did, for his poetic soul was far above petty considerations of punctuality, he met Miss Sickles' sharp eye fixed upon him.

"Master Biggs," she said, in full hearing of all the small boys, who were wont to tremble at her voice, "you have not washed your face again, this morning. You will please go back and do it at once before you sit down to breakfast."

Biggs pretended not to hear, but he turned very red. Miss Sickles repeated her command in a sterner tone, and Mr. Monk looked up from his seat at the other end of the table. There was no help for it. Abashed and enraged, our leader turned back to the door, and retired to his ablutions. But before he left the room he darted one look towards the imperious house-keeper, a look of stern purpose and fixed resolve which seemed to say: *No matter ! A time will come.*

In that basin Biggs washed away all thoughts of indecision and delay. It was half an hour afterwards that we were summoned together and informed by our leaders of their sudden determination. They had actually settled that at a given signal, a little before bed-time, we should rise and take possession of the schoolroom. Mr. Wilkins, the assistant master, was to be overpowered, and either driven out or held in our hands as a hostage. There was a division of opinion on this point, but in any case, “not a hair of his head should be hurt,” Biggs declared. Then the door was to be fastened with nails and screws, and a huge barricade of tables and forms to be heaped up behind it; the barricade was the fashionable feature at revolutions at that day, and must on no account be omitted. Through an aperture for ventilation in the upper part of the door, we could then hold parley with the enemy, who would doubtless lose no time in coming to the attack; and the only terms we should listen to were the

redress of our grievances, as set forth in a manifesto drawn up by Biggs, under three heads, viz. :—

Art. I. Return to the old hours of study.

Art. II. Restoration of our supper.

Art. III. The abolition of Miss Sickles' penal jurisdiction.

To these conditions must of course be added the promise of a full amnesty to all concerned, and security that our oppressors would not revoke their concessions as soon as we had laid down our arms. The last was a *quid pro quo*, as Biggs said, warned by the experience of other European revolutions. I rather think he meant *sine quâ non*, but one phrase impressed us just as much as the other, and gave us confidence in a leader so well acquainted with the forms of diplomatic negotiations. If these terms should not be at once granted, we were to hold out, keeping watch turn about and sleeping on the forms, and if attacked we must resist by force of arms to the last extremity. But our position would be impregnable if the door were only well barricaded. The windows were strongly barred; we should be provisioned for a siege; all would depend on our own resolution. Our leaders did not conceal from us, however, that the matter would be no child's play. Collins openly said that in all probability Mr. Monk would bring in the police to his aid; he even darkly hinted that in such cases the military were sometimes called out. On the other hand, it was cheering to learn on such good

authority that if we only held out for twenty-four hours, our master was bound to accept our conditions : such was the etiquette of barrings out, Collins assured us.

This was the project fully disclosed to all the boys except the very youngest, who were merely desired to hold themselves in readiness to obey orders. There was no retreat possible ; and the fact of the time fixed being so near at hand was perhaps favourable to our fidelity. We had not time to think the matter over soberly, and, carried away by the enthusiasm of our leaders, we vowed to stand by them to the last drop of our blood. To animate us still further, Biggs recited one of the " Lays of Ancient Rome," which all the boys who slept in his room had been made to learn off by heart, as a punishment for engaging in a pillow fight.

It may be imagined that few of us were in a mood to pay much attention to our studies that morning, so little so, indeed, that it is a wonder Mr. Monk did not suspect there was something wrong. As it was, he seemed not very well pleased, and gave the first and second classes a long imposition to write out for next morning, which, in their eyes, was only another reason for bringing on the rebellion. It had been proposed to include the abolition of impositions in the charter of liberties to be presented to our master ; but some of the more prudent and moderate minded of the conspirators suggested that this might be reserved for consideration till we saw how our other demands

were received. "We have only to teach them that they cannot trample on us with impunity!" quoth Biggs. "That will be enough."

There was no afternoon school; this day had been chosen partly because it was a half-holiday, allowing plenty of time for our preparations, and one of the days, moreover, on which we might go out to the town for an hour to spend what money we had—we had not much; for, like the poet and his school-fellows—

"Exclude

A little weekly stipend, and we lived
Through three divisions of the quartered year
In penniless poverty"—

tempered in our case by occasional windfalls in the way of "tips," a word scarcely admissible into Wordsworth's dignified verse. But what we had we gave freely to the common fund which was raised to furnish supplies, or, if we did not give freely, Collins made us give otherwise. Still our public treasury would have contained only a few shillings if Biggs had not magnanimously come forward with a whole sovereign, which his grandmother had just sent him on his birthday, and which he unreservedly handed over to the common stock. In return for this liberality, we could do no less than appoint Biggs treasurer. The sum at his disposal was exactly one pound seven shillings and eightpence, and a short consultation was held to settle how this should be expended.

Biggs was decidedly in favour of Spartan fare; our

garrison should be provisioned with nothing but the bare necessities of life, and all luxury banished till our cause was triumphant. He even suggested raw turnips, bringing forward the example of a remarkably incorruptible Roman hero, who had been accustomed to nourish his integrity on this vegetable. Collins, on the other hand, had more generous notions of the fare appropriate to conspirators, and mentioned currant wine as a highly revolutionary beverage. He also proposed a supply of raw beef-steaks, to be cooked in the intervals of military operations. Hereupon a serious division of opinion arose between our leaders; but after an animated debate, we found, on calculating our ways and means, that if we were to sustain a siege of twenty-four hours, we must be content with meagre rations. It never occurred to us that no water was to be got at in our fortress, and we arranged to provide nothing but eatables.

If, just before dinner-time, the government officials had been on the look-out, they would have seen each boy stealing up to the schoolroom by a back way, with a half-quartern loaf and a great lump of cheese hid away under his jacket. Eggs had also been bought, two a-piece, and a saucepan to boil them in, as well as salt and pepper enough for a whole regiment. Twenty Brazil nuts per boy were served out; and Biggs was understood to have a reserve store of captains' biscuits, under lock and key, to be used only as a last resource. The rest of the provisions were stowed

away in our play boxes, which stood round the school-room. As the night might be cold, coals and wood were brought from the cellar—*stolen*, I ought to say, if it had not been done in such a noble cause—and smuggled into the house in some of our hat-boxes. All this was accomplished without any apparent suspicion on the part of the authorities. They did not notice even that the poker and tongs had been abstracted from the dining-room.

No games were played that afternoon. Even if we had been in the mind for such frivolity, it was a wet afternoon, and we spent it in the schoolroom, discussing the forthcoming event and looking to our arms. Biggs and Collins formed the various classes into companies, appointed captains, and tried to drill us. The first company were to be armed with catapults and fire-irons; the second with cricket-stumps; the third with hockey-sticks; the smallest boys were to act as powder-monkeys and supply ammunition to the front ranks. Several of the desks were turned into magazines of pebbles and small lumps of coal. My dark lantern was filled with oil and concealed in a corner. Biggs exhibited to our great admiration a blood-red sash, which he meant to put on as soon as the fighting began. Then we rehearsed, as far as possible, the scene of the evening. Each of us was told off to some special duty; some were to turn out the lights, some to nail up the door, some to drag up benches for the barricade. It would all be done in a

minute if every one played his part like a man. We made such a noise, practising our various parts, that Wilkins, the usher, who was supposed to be looking after us, popped his head into the room, and wanted to know what we were about. We told him we were playing at soldiers; and he withdrew, smiling at our childish sport! If he had only known that it was in grim earnest we were under arms!

Tea passed off as usual, except that we had jam that evening for a treat. If the matter had not gone so far, this mark of liberality on the part of our rulers might have made us relent; but it was too late. Collins frowned threateningly at a boy who expressed gratitude to Miss Sickles for the jam. We would eat it, but it could not change our resolution. Indeed, the word was passed round to eat as much at tea as we could, to save our own stores.

After tea there came an interval of play, before we were called upon to prepare our lessons for the next day. It might be thought that this would have been the best time to raise the standard of revolt; but the fact was, we had reason to believe that Mr. Monk would probably be out later in the evening, and, with all our determination, we would rather not have him to deal with till our barricades were made sure. Besides, in Biggs' eyes, an insurrection would be nothing if not theatrical, and he had the idea of letting the signal come from our oppressors themselves. When the clock in the passage struck eight, it was usual for

Mr. Wilkins, or whoever might be superintending our studies, to let us rise from our seats. Then we would spring up, and shout out our war-cry. "*Horatius Cocles!*" was to be the watchword, and the counter-sign, "*Liberty, Fraternity, and Equality!*"

It now occurred to one of the conspirators, who had studied the newspapers of the day to some purpose, that at this point we ought to elect a provisional government, and the notion met with approval. But here signs of dissension again appeared between our leaders. A provisional government, it was stated, should have a president, and as neither Biggs nor Collins was willing to play the second part, the Roman machinery of government, admitting as it did of two chief magistrates, was evidently better suited to the circumstances of our republic. Yet even Biggs declared that in times of war it was desirable to appoint a dictator with supreme power. Luckily his classical reading enabled him to suggest a compromise. Biggs and Collins agreed to be dictators in turn, hour about, as soon as the fighting began. They should draw lots for the first turn of office, and when the cause was victorious, a president might be elected by free vote of all the rebels.

The final arrangements were thus made. Brandy-balls were distributed among the younger boys, to keep up their courage and ensure their fidelity. Collins was very violent towards some fellows who began to show signs of cowardice now that the hour drew

near. He boxed the ears of one boy for simply suggesting that some traitor might betray the plot to Mr. Monk, and that then we should probably get the worst of it. Biggs mounted upon a form, and would have made us an inspiring harangue.

" We must remember," he said, " that this was the most important day of our lives. Our conduct on this night would decide whether we were to be free for ever, or slaves who deserved all that Miss Sickles could do to them. The eyes of all the other schools in the town would be fixed on us when it was known what we had done, and we should be awfully laughed at if we didn't behave with courage. More than we thought depended on us ; we were about to fight for the rights and privileges of schoolboys all over the world. For his own part, he could promise that he would never submit till——"

" Take your seats ! " cried Mr. Wilkins, entering at this moment ; and such is the force of habit, that we obediently got out our books, and sat down as usual in our places.

" Now, boys, let us see how quiet and industrious you can be to-night," said the assistant-master, rubbing his hands, and trying to look cheerful, as if he quite expected us to do what he wished.

Mr. Wilkins was a mild, easy-going man, to whom the task of keeping us in order was a heavy burden. This night he must have been surprised at the calmness which reigned throughout the schoolroom. It

was the calm before a thunderstorm. A volcano was about to burst beneath his feet, and there he sat unconscious and indifferent, only glancing round him now and then, as if suspicious that some mischief must be brewing under this unusual good behaviour. But he could detect nothing. We did not trouble about our lessons for next day, but we sat still, and thought on the approaching crisis, and kept looking to our leaders for encouragement. No sign of fear was to be read upon their serene countenances. Collins was polishing the barrel of his pistol under the table. Biggs was copying out in his best hand our declaration of revolt and a memorial of the grievances which we required to be redressed before returning to our allegiance. He was writing with red ink upon blue foolscap, and this declaration of rights was to be signed by us all presently, in a form not yet agreed upon by our leaders. Collins, who had stories of mutinies running in his head, insisted upon a round robin, while Biggs' historical studies led him to prefer Magna Charta as a model.

The hour went slowly by. Mr. Wilkins was reading a newspaper; he seemed to be nodding as if about to drop off to sleep. Silence still prevailed along our benches, and there was a serious look upon most of the boys' faces. The more we thought over what we were about to do, the more some of us began to see the gravity of it. Some were excited and restless. Some looked anxious; others merely puzzled at the

prospect of the new experience which was before us. Young soldiers, I should think, look so, when they know that only a wood or a hill is between them and the enemy's guns, and that in a few minutes they will be for the first time under fire.

Never were watches consulted more frequently by those among us who had them, and who were constantly employed in telegraphing the time to their friends in various parts of the room. These watches differed, and we could not be certain how the time was going by the clock in the hall, which we could hear ticking towards the stroke of that hour which was to be our tocsin. Never did an hour seem to pass more irksomely. Even the great-souled Biggs began to fidget on his seat.

At last we thought we heard the hall clock give a louder tick, as was its nature to, a few minutes before striking. There was a slight stir on our benches, and a whisper ran along that the time was at hand. The suspense became terrible. All eyes were turned on Biggs; his face lighted up, and he cast round him glances of encouragement, as if calling upon us to be ready and bold. Collins was scowling, while his fingers played beneath the table with the trigger of his pistol.

All ears were listening for the striking of the clock, when a soft but firm tread was heard without; the door opened wide, and Miss Sickles stood before us. With one look round the room, she walked up to Mr.

Wilkins and whispered something in his ear. The usher nodded.

“Master Collins, you are to come with me!” she said.

We started. Could she have discovered our plot? What meant this sudden summons? What would Collins do? He did not budge, but growled out—

“I’m at my lessons.”

“You come this moment!” repeated Miss Sickles, in such a tone, and with such an eye, as few of us were able to say nay to. When Miss Sickles chose to exercise it, she seemed to be possessed of an almost magnetic power of having her own way.

Collins looked round at us. We made no movement. Every eye was fixed anxiously upon him. It was a critical moment. He hesitated; he wriggled about on the form; he gave in; he rose from his seat.

“You are to come, too, Master Biggs,” said the housekeeper, in her commanding way, and Biggs also was fain to obey. He thought he was about to be called upon to play the part of a martyr, and rather liked the notion than otherwise, I believe.

Fancy our surprise and dismay, when we saw our leaders following Miss Sickles out of the room, Collins with a sullen frown on his face, Biggs with the lofty look becoming a hero who was being led off to pine in the dungeons of the tyrant. The first impression of the rest of us also was that we had been betrayed;

and when the door had closed upon Biggs and Collins we felt that our strength was indeed gone from us.

But before we had time to realise the situation, Mr. Wilkins—pleased, no doubt, at our quiet behaviour, and wishing to reward it by letting us off a few minutes before the proper time—got up from his chair, yawned, and said—

"That will do for to-night, boys. You may put away your books."

No one moved.

"I said you might go."

It was his turn to be surprised. Instead of leaping up with noisy glee, we all sat preternaturally still, and looked round us, as if to ask one another what we were to do.

Suddenly the clock struck, and at this sound one bold boy jumped to his feet and raised a shout. Most of us only stared at him, but a few made some attempt to back him up. A form was overturned; two or three books flew across the room; there was a clatter as of fire-irons beneath the table. But still the insurrection was hanging fire, when Miss Sickles again appeared at the door, and the noise ceased all at once.

"Are you going to make a disturbance because Mr. Monk is out?" she said severely. "I won't have it. The hair-cutter has come, and those who hadn't their hair cut last week will go to him in the dining-room, as soon as he is done with Master Biggs and

Collins. The rest of you had better go to bed and be out of the way. Come, be off!"

She addressed particularly the youngest boys, who stood nearest the door. It was assailing us in our weakest point. They durst not set her at defiance. They wavered—they went. And the others, except some half-dozen who were to stay and have their hair cut, went also, filing out in an orderly manner, as the custom was. No one liked to begin resistance to her commands. Deprived of our leaders, our numbers melting away every moment, even the most determined spirits saw that all was lost. In three minutes we were bestowed in our bedrooms in separate parts of the house.

Here was an ignominious end to our plot! Our courage was all gone now, and we began to tremble at the consequences of a discovery. Presently Biggs and Collins came upstairs, with close-cropped heads, and countenances full of disgust. They went from room to room, consoling their adherents, and assuring them that the rising was only postponed till next day. But we did not respond heartily to their appeals to remain faithful to the cause. I think most of us were on the whole much relieved not to find ourselves in arms, as at that hour we had expected to be. It was much more satisfactory to lie in bed and talk over what we should have done if our project had not thus come to nought, and of what we should do next day, perhaps!

Next day it so happened that a box of new cricket things arrived from London, and created such an excitement that we had time to think of nothing else. Even Biggs and Collins, earnest as they were about their conspiracy, were still more enthusiastic about cricket. So the matter dropped somehow. We reconciled ourselves to the oppression of our rulers as best we could, and all the rest of the time I was at that school nothing more was heard of a barring-out, or of any other form of insurrection.

I hope, in conclusion, that no other schoolboys will follow our example ; but if they fancy themselves ill-used, let them remember that few persons in this world are able to be contented, and take to their hearts the sound advice of a certain poet—

"Use not complaints unseemly,
Though you must work like bricks ;
And it is cold, extremely,
Rising at half-past six.

"Soon sunnier will the day grow,
And the east wind not blow so,
Soon, as of yore, L'Allegro
Succeed Il Penseroso.

"Stick to your ' Mangnall's Questions,'
And Long-Division sums,
And come—with good digestions—
Home when next Christmas comes,'

THE INJURED INNOCENT.
THE SORROWS OF A LAD AND A LADY.



THE INJURED INNOCENT.

CHAPTER I.

THE visitor to the venerable fane of Whitminster will do well to give sixpence to the officious verger for the privilege of ascending the tower, from which he will get a bird's-eye view of the quaint old town and a pleasant prospect over a wide stretch of characteristically English scenery. And one of the first spots on which his eye falls will probably be a curious patch of irregularly shaped and sized gardens, lying snug and green at his feet, and enclosed, as he will see, in a triangle formed by the backs of three short rows of houses—Westgate, or one of the divisions of the street so named, irregular ancient stone buildings, held in high respect; the Paragon, tall, square, dingy brick mansions, nearly a hundred years old and quite genteel; and Albert Terrace, all stucco, bow windows, green blinds, and modern improvements.

This triangular block of buildings was irreverently

termed the "Asses' Bridge" by clever young gentlemen of the neighbourhood who went to school and learned Euclid, and who, in exercising their wit at its expense, were conscious of not fouling their own nest, since their noisy kind was conspicuous by its absence from the Triangle, which had therefore the reputation of being one of the quietest parts of the town. Albert Terrace was chiefly tenanted by young married couples; the Paragon by grave citizens, with grown-up families or tribes of girls, as chance had it; and the four detached houses of Westgate by single ladies, or unmarried clergymen. Strange to say, at the time of which I write there existed in the refined precincts of the Triangle abundance of small children, a swarm of great girls, a sufficiency of promising young men, but only one actual boy. A definition of the word *boy* is wanting; I venture to supply one. A boy may be considered as a male human creature during that second octavo of life in which he is least under the influence of the other sex. When a child is free from the power of the nursery-maid, and can no longer be constrained to put on a clean pinafore, he becomes a boy; and he is ceasing to be one as soon as he voluntarily wears his best clothes to gain favour in female eyes.

In the Triangle, then, there was only one person answering to this definition, and that was the boy Wyld, twelve or thirteen years old, freckled, untidy, rough, and restless, as boys are apt to be. He was the

orphan son of a sea-captain. Years before, the father's vessel, on board of which were his wife and child, had foundered in the middle of the Atlantic, and among the few souls picked up to tell the tale was this boy, lashed to a spar by his father, five minutes before he went down with his ship, like an English sailor, while the terrified passengers were madly struggling to swamp the overcrowded boats. The mother's body was there too, but she was dead of cold and exhaustion. Some of my readers may remember the story in the newspapers of the day. The boy had been brought to England and somewhat grudgingly adopted by his unmarried uncle, Dr. Wyld, a hard, dry, disappointed man, who for more than twenty years had lived in the smallest and ugliest house of the Paragon, and for some reason or other, probably because of his surly, forbidding manner, had never advanced far in the more profitable paths of his profession, though at the Union and the Dispensary his services were considered invaluable in repressing pauper ailments.

When this friendless little fellow first came to live in his uncle's dull house, the whole neighbourhood was disposed to look on him with great interest and sympathy. At home he was treated with cold neglect, fed and lodged, but little more; out of doors for a time he was pitied and petted to a degree that would spoil any child. All the ladies of the Triangle were willing to make much of him, and it was with real concern that they soon found he was not a material to be made

much of by them. With his romantic antecedents, it was a pity he should turn out such a rebellious little imp, with no sense of juvenile propriety, and only increasing in turbulence with years. He altogether refused to behave prettily; he romped in the most decorous drawing-rooms; he could keep his fingers off nothing, and put his foot into everything; he showed himself either helplessly shy or irrepressibly noisy; he had no graces or accomplishments, except such as whistling or standing on his head, which he insisted on exhibiting on all inconvenient occasions. Clearly he was not an ornament or an acquisition to well-behaved society, and his lady friends began to give him up, with many a lament over the way in which Dr. Wyld was neglecting his training. But their disapproval of the uncle was transferred in full to the nephew, as the propensities of the latter were developed. Soon his conduct became such as to withdraw the last rag of their favour from him; and when the boy Wyld had attained to trousers and jackets his character was fully revealed in all its objectionable features. The only boy of the Triangle was considered as great a plague to it as a round dozen of them might have been expected to be. He teased the girls; he was impudent to the young gentlemen; the old ones tumbled on slides of his making; he upset children out of their perambulators, not so much from ill-nature as from an excess of zeal; he indulged in unseemly levity towards the servant-maids, and would not speak civilly to their

mistresses; he made friends with low street boys, and fought with them, too, in public; he broke windows, chased cats, and entertained strange dogs; he climbed anywhere, he tumbled into everything, he seemed afraid of nothing and nobody; in fact, he was generally rude, boisterous, and mischievous, and might well be held a scandal to such a sober neighbourhood. Complaints about his pranks were, from time to time, made to his uncle, who was not wanting in due severity; but punishment and scolding were all thrown away on the boy Wyld, who, moreover, would probably not be long of playing some impudent trick at the expense of the person who had "sneaked about him," as he expressed it. So it came to pass that he was a young Ishmaelite among the other inhabitants of the Triangle; his rough hands were against all of them, and all of them looked on him as a most dangerous and undesirable neighbour.

Luckily for these good people and for himself, he was sent to the Grammar School as soon as he could read, and took to it as readily as a dog to water. There was no "creeping unwillingly" in the case of this boy, who scarcely knew what home was. The school was his club, where he found friends and fun and full scope for his energies. Not that he showed much love for his books, but I am writing of a date before country grammar schools had got hopelessly enclosed in the net of competitive examinations, and when a lad with a tolerably thick skin and easy con-

science could make shift to pass through the lower forms without being over-much laborious. Wyld did as little work and as much play as possible, and passed at school as neither better nor worse than most of his comrades, among whom he was rather a favourite than otherwise.

All day, then, the boy Wyld was out of the way, but in the evening his uncle's rule was for him to stay at home that he might learn his lessons, and as likely as not he smuggled some companion into the back garden for a little congenial amusement, involving probably a catapult or a ball, and climbing into the other gardens to get it. Then perhaps there would be a shout and a crash, as of broken glass, and Miss Telfer, sitting in the drawing-room at the back of her house in Westgate, would lay down her teacup, and exclaim instinctively—

“That boy Wyld!”

“That boy Wyld!” would echo Poll, her parrot, trying to stretch his fat green neck between the bars of his cage to see what was the matter. Then the starling would choke and gurgle and try to repeat the same phrase, and all the canary birds and bullfinches would twitter and hop in sympathy.

Miss Telfer lived next door to Dr. Wyld, or rather round the corner, the back of their gardens being contiguous. Her pretty little house was quite an aviary. There were forty-three birds, without reckoning its mistress, who was so tiny and timid and

smooth and elegant that she might be thought to have partly grown into the nature of her feathered friends. She looked as if a puff of wind could blow her off her perch in this rough world, and was, indeed, one of the most nervous, delicate, sensitive old maids in Whitminster. So it may readily be imagined that she was not fond of boys.

But she had tried to be friendly with the boy Wyld. Report said that Miss Telfer had once been engaged to a naval officer, killed in the Crimea; be that as it may, her tender heart was unusually soft towards the sailor's orphan, and she had done her best to show kindness to him, and was long-suffering before she admitted him to be hopelessly undeserving of it. Her splendid King Parrot, the monarch of her menagerie, had from the first shown himself ill-disposed towards the boy Wyld, and took an early opportunity of biting his fingers, whereupon the graceless urchin pulled a feather out of the screaming bird's tail; but not even then did Miss Telfer withdraw her countenance wholly from him. His perverse and mischievous disposition, however, rendered him more and more unbearable, and he was finally cast out as reprobate when the good lady discovered him knocking down a poor sparrow with a stone in her very garden. If the sparrow had been consulted, he might have preferred a violent death in this way to perpetual imprisonment in a cage; but Miss Telfer was like the majority of the civilised world, who think cruelty to mean nothing but

blood and bruises; and from that day she renounced the boy Wyld, falling back upon her principle that all boys were the pariahs of good society, and among the main troubles of life, permitted to afflict the earth by a mysterious dispensation of Providence.

"They have such disagreeable voices and such awkward manners," she used to chirp out, looking round with affectionate pride at her feathered flock.

There was another race besides that of boys which Miss Telfer could not but look upon with aversion—cats. And at that time the gardens of the Triangle actually swarmed with a plague of cats—

"Black cats, brown cats, grey cats, tawny cats,
Big cats, small cats, thin cats, brawny cats;
Grave old baskers, gay young friskers,
Tabby cats with claws and whiskers."

Each household in the three streets had its authorised and domesticated puss, except only that of Miss Telfer, where of course no such insidious beast of prey was entertained to disturb the peace of mind of her birds. But besides these regular forces, there were troops of guerilla cats, cats of fortune, so to speak, which prowled about, gaunt and unkempt, from roof to roof and from wall to wall, without visible means of subsistence. Where they came from nobody knew, but there they were, a nuisance to the whole neighbourhood, and, like gipsies, could not be got rid of. They made their way into cellars; they stole scraps; they wrought havoc in flower-beds; they fought and made love in an

obtrusively public manner; and the most noisy and unprincipled of them delighted in choosing the dead of night for the hour of their disturbances, when even boys were safe in bed. To do the boy Wyld justice, when other people only talked of the nuisance, he took the field and kept up a perpetual war against the feline race. But it was only the more inoffensive civilised cats which he succeeded in terrifying; the rogues and vagabonds seemed rather to like the fun than otherwise, and increased in number and impudence in spite of his sticks and catapults, which added a zest of adventure to their precarious existence.

"Oh dear, oh dear!" sighed Miss Telfer, as she turned about in her great feather bed, and tried not to listen to one of her whiskered enemies, which was screaming in the next garden like a child in pain. Then, when it had tired itself out, and she had begun to doze off into a restless nightmare, in which she thought a gigantic cat's jaws were closing on her orange-breasted wax-bill, the pearl of her aviary, she would start up to hear the shrieking and squealing of a battle-royal beneath her window, and, when this had died away, the discordant notes of a lovesick Tom caterwauling to the moon among the chimney-pots, alternating with the faint miauings of a deserted kitten in the distance, would keep her in such a state of restlessness that the poor lady could not get an honest wink of sleep all night.

At last she could bear it no longer, and sought con-

solation and counsel from Dr. Grey, her medical and general adviser. He listened to her story with all the attention due to a profitable patient, and sympathised with her in the ready way which made nervous old ladies think him the best of doctors.

“Cats ! you may well grumble at them, Miss Telfer. For my part, I wish the whole breed had been drowned in the Deluge. There is no other creature that occupies such a conspicuous place in the catalogue of human ills,” chuckled Dr. Grey, who was a chatty old gentleman and loved his little joke.

“What am I to do, doctor ?” entreated Miss Telfer, in a sorrowful twitter. “I assure you I can’t sleep for them, and my nerves are in *such* a state all day.”

“If I were so much troubled, I’ll tell you what I should do,” said the doctor, “I should get a squib and put a light to it and fling it out among them some of these nights. That would give them a scare, I’ll be bound. But we must see to this, Miss Telfer, or I shall have to send you to Weston again. We must brace up the system, ma’am ; we must brace up the system.”

So spoke Dr. Grey and wrote out a prescription, and Miss Telfer departed, strengthened in mind by the prospect of having her system braced up. But that part of the doctor’s advice which perhaps he had scarcely given seriously had also made a great impression on her. Miss Telfer’s gentle nature was stirred up to the point of combating her feline foes,

even by gunpowder ; and on her way home, happening to pass by a shop in an obscure part of the town, where a card announced that fireworks were to be bought, she stopped, turned, hesitated, and at last fluttered into the shop and shyly made request for a squib.

"What sort of a squib, ma'am?" said the shop-keeper, staring at her a little, which did not diminish her timidity.

"Any kind — the largest — the best," said Miss Telfer, and the tradesman of course took her as meaning the most expensive.

The fact was that, the fifth of November being still far off, he had no stock of fireworks on hand. But rummaging through a box, he picked out a huge cracker, remaining from last year's supply, and asked if that would do.

"It won't go off in my fingers?" was the only stipulation Miss Telfer had to make ; and the man assured her that it was quite harmless, and instructed her how to light and throw it. I don't quite know what kind of firework it was that Miss Telfer became possessed of, but from the sequel it was clearly one of a complicated nature, and it cost her sixpence.

When she got home Miss Telfer made haste to lock her dangerous acquisition away in a drawer, all by itself, and it was three days before she ventured to make any use of it. But on the third night the cats became more noisy than ever, and the bracing-up

medicine seemed to have no effect. Moreover, the parrot had been waked up, too, and was screaming downstairs at the pitch of his voice, "The boy Wyld! The boy Wyld! I want my dinner! Pretty Poll!"

"I can't endure this," piped Miss Telfer, at last getting up and putting on her dressing-gown. She opened her window just a little bit, and, having satisfied herself that the wind was not in the east, peeped out with a scarf round her head, looking as like Lady Macbeth as a nervous little old dame can do. The cats stopped for a moment, then renewed their hideous concert with double fury. Miss Telfer in her excitement fancied that there were at least a dozen of them in her neighbour's garden. She drew back and stood screwing up her courage for a minute; then her resolution was taken. She stole on tiptoe to the drawer where her artillery was hidden, unlocked it, lit a taper, and with trembling hands applied it to the match of the cracker, which she then hastily flung out of the window as far as she could, which was not far, for it fell upon the roof of her little conservatory.

For a moment there was silence, but in a moment more the cracker began to burst. Bang, fizz! it went, and the cats fled howling in all directions as it jumped, banging and dancing, among them. Bang, bang! and at every detonation somebody leaped out of bed in alarm. Windows were thrown up, heads thrust out, screams might be heard, cries of "Police!" were echoed back—the whole of the Triangle was



aroused. Then steps were trampling in the gardens, lights moved about, voices here and there, and the commotion went on increasing long after the cause of it had banged and burned itself out. Nobody knew exactly what had happened. Some spoke of an earthquake, some of a thunderbolt; some thought the gas-works had been blown up, and some that a murder had been committed. And when fathers and brothers were able to soothe the fears of their families and pronounce the affair a mischievous trick, there remained the indignant question, “Who did it?”

Who indeed! Poor Miss Telfer, struck with horror at the unexpected performances of her *fatalis machina*, had fled into bed, and lay quaking with her head buried beneath the blankets.





CHAPTER II.

NEXT morning the night's disturbance was the theme of conversation at most of the breakfast-tables of the Triangle, and there was complete unanimity of suspicion as to the author of it. There was only one boy in the three streets, and he, no doubt, was at that moment exulting with his rude companions over the success of his freak. His impudence was no longer to be put up with ; it was intolerable that quiet, respectable people should be frightened out of their sleep by such malicious tricks. Something must be done.

In the course of the day Miss Telfer had a call from Mrs. Gargoyle, of the Paragon, the minor canon's wife, who came to condole with her over the agitation she must have undergone, and to tell her what steps were being taken for the punishment of the culprit.

"I never heard of such a thing!" Mrs. Gargoyle declared indignantly, at least half a dozen times.

"There's poor Mrs. Browne, with her heart complaint ; it's a mercy she was not terrified to death."

"Oh dear!" Miss Telfer gave a little cry.

"And you, Miss Telfer, in the state of your nerves ! I assure you, I fully expected to find you in bed."

"It has quite upset me ; it has indeed !" said Miss Telfer, pecking at her smelling-bottle.

"But of course we know who did it—oh, the little wretch !" said Mrs. Gargoyle.

"That boy Wyld ! That boy Wyld !" screamed the parrot above her head.

"Yes ; that dreadful boy Wyld ! But his uncle can't have a grain of sense if he does not punish him severely as he deserves. Mr. Gargoyle is going to speak to Dr. Wyld about it at the dispensary meeting ; and I do hope the child will get a lesson against these dreadful habits."

"Oh, I don't think he did it," said poor Miss Telfer, all in a twitter.

"My dear, there can be no doubt about it. Have you ever seen the way in which that boy fidgets about when Mr. Gargoyle is preaching ? The dreadful creature is always playing with fireworks and dangerous things of that sort, and it was in the Wylds' garden, you know, that the explosion took place. Oh, Miss Telfer, I wonder that you weren't frightened out of your life ! But now I must go and ask how poor Mrs. Browne is."

When her visitor was gone Miss Telfer flew out into

her little conservatory, and sat down, with fluttering heart, to think over what she had just heard. The very idea of any one being punished for her fault filled her with dismay. She longed to have had the courage to tell Mrs. Gargoyle the truth ; she half resolved to sit down and write a note to her containing a full confession. But then there would be the astonishment, the scandal, the ridicule ! Miss Telfer quite trembled to think of what people would say. She felt as if she were a great criminal ; no forger or burglar, hiding from the police, had ever such a troubled mind. It would be found out somehow ; she could never show her cap again at the tea-parties of Whitminster ; and, worst of all, in the meanwhile this innocent boy would bear the shame and the punishment. Oh that she had never meddled with such things as squibs ! For the first time she lost faith in Dr. Grey.

But what was she to do ? what could she do ? She could not confess. To be the joke of the whole community was more than ladylike flesh and blood could bear ; yet her tender conscience would give her no rest, if an injustice were committed through her cowardice. She would run away to Weston, and let the truth be disclosed, and not return for years till the public indignation had died away. This way and that her excited mind was swayed, and meanwhile the parrot screamed unheeded in the drawing-room behind, and one of the leanest and most disreputable-looking of the marauding cats had crept along the wall of her

garden, and was crouching within ten feet of her, looking slyly out of his half-open eyes, as if pleased to see into what a scrape she had brought herself.

"Oh these cats! these cats!" murmured Miss Telfer, and shook her handkerchief at it, calling out with as much anger as was in her nature, "Go away! Go away!" Away went the cat like a rocket, but less in obedience to Miss Telfer's injunction than by reason of a broken bottle which at the same moment was thrown at it from the other side of the wall, showing that the boy Wyld had returned from school, and was disporting himself according to his wont in his uncle's back premises. Suddenly Miss Telfer heard the loud, harsh voice of Dr. Wyld through the open door of the surgery.

"Come here, sir, and tell me what you mean by this fine prank. I'll teach you to throw fireworks out of my windows in the middle of the night."

Miss Telfer thought she would have fainted. She almost embraced a geranium-pot in her agitation. For a minute she could make out nothing distinctly, except that Dr. Wyld was talking angrily. "Don't say you didn't do it, sir. You are the worry of my life; there is scarcely a day that somebody does not complain to me of your conduct, and I am determined to take it out of you. I tell you I will teach you——"

So much Miss Telfer heard and wished to rise and call out, but she could not, and sat pale and shuddering. Then the surgery door was shut with a bang,

and within there was a dull sound of blows. There were none of the screams which she expected to follow, but if the boy Wyld did not cry, Miss Telfer did most bitterly.

She had another wretched night. The cats left her in peace this time, but conscience is more troublesome than cats, and Miss Telfer thought she would never sleep sound again, now that her hands were stained with the blood of this innocent victim. The details of corporal punishment being unfamiliar to her, her fancy kept calling up a sickening scene of horror, for which her cowardice was responsible. And crime will always out, she said to herself. Oh, where should she hide herself when Mrs. Gargoyle knew the truth and had set forth to bear the news from drawing-room to drawing-room?

Early in the morning she was up feeding her birds, but that gave her no comfort. She caught herself again and again peeping out from the drawn blind of her front parlour, in fearful hope of catching a sight of the injured boy, pale, suffering, and resentful. At last she did see him, on his way to school.

He did not seem much the worse for whatever he had undergone; his cap was stuck the wrong way on the back of his head as usual; he was whistling a vulgar tune, and stopped for a second in front of Miss Telfer's window to give a kick to an abandoned cabbage-stalk on the pavement. Another second and Miss Telfer could no longer have restrained herself

from knocking at the window, beckoning him in, and overwhelming him with cake and wine and all the silver in her purse. But while she hesitated he caught sight of a schoolfellow and scampered after him, and she was glad she had not ventured to meet his eye. He would suspect, he would denounce her ; her crime would come to light at once. No ! as long as possible she must lock the secret in her breast. Miss Telfer felt that in the last two days she had grown years older.

A few days passed away, and with them the danger of discovery. The neighbours appeared to have forgotten all about it ; but Miss Telfer did not forget. Her conscience kept on accusing her, and she never heard the boy Wyld's voice without a fresh prick. She durst not look him in the face, but she thought often how she might make up for the injury done to him. She sometimes meditated buying a cricket-bat and sending it to him anonymously ; then, again, she fancied it would be a good thing to speak a word for him to his master at the school, who was a friend of hers. But her habitual hesitation kept her from doing anything else than distressing herself to no purpose. Jane, the maid, did not know what had come to her mistress. She thought it must be the death of the prettiest of her love-birds in moulting. But no ; Miss Telfer would have given a wilderness of love-birds that this should not have happened which we know of. She fretted over it till she felt really ill.

Then she sent for Dr. Grey, and had half made up her mind to take him into her confidence. But again her courage failed her ; the wrongs of the boy Wyld remained unredressed, and Dr. Grey's tonics ministered in vain to the mental disease of his patient.

As poor Miss Telfer feared, a dire punishment was not long of falling upon her guilty head, a worse calamity than even the epidemic which seemed to have broken out among her small birds. She had been to forenoon service at the minster, she had heard the parable of Nathan against David, and with a pang had taken the lesson home to herself ; she came back to her house, meditating over the consequences of that unfortunate night, and at the door was met by Jane, who was waiting with a thunderbolt on her lips.

" Oh, Miss Telfer, the parrot has got out of his cage ! "

" Oh, dear ! " exclaimed Miss Telfer, scarcely realising the calamity at first, till she had hurried into the drawing-room and saw the empty and open cage of her favourite—favourite is a weak word to express Miss Telfer's love for that parrot, which in its youth had been given her, so people said, by the naval officer before mentioned, and was now the familiar friend and companion of her old age. Jane followed breathlessly, giving details of the catastrophe, it appeared, by the carelessness of the new girl, Kitty, who was now cowering in the kitchen, not daring to meet her mistress's eyes.

"And where has my darling gone to?" cried poor Miss Telfer. "Oh, Jane, we must not lose him — I can't bear to think of losing him."

"He is sitting on the pear-tree in the garden, and I asked the boy Wyld to come over and catch him," was Jane's reply, and Miss Telfer flew into the garden.

There, sure enough, was the erring Poll, sitting lordly in the middle of the pear-tree, altogether disdainful of the blandishments of the boy Wyld, who was standing below fishing for him with a bone fastened to a long pole. He had been standing thus for the last half-hour, patiently awaiting the pleasure of his old enemy; for the boy Wyld, whatever his faults may have been, was always willing to be of use where his peculiar talents came into play, and as it was now the holidays, he had plenty of time on his hands. Being engaged in serious business, he scarcely turned his head when Miss Telfer appeared, but went on poking his bait up into the tree. At such a juncture Miss Telfer forgot everything else, and hailed with joy the presence of this shock-haired, sunburnt lad with the patched trousers and rough hands, that had so often shocked her sensibilities when there was no parrot to be caught.

"Oh, Johnny, can't you get him down?" cried Miss Telfer, in her emotion using the familiar name of the boy Wyld's childish and more innocent days.

"No; the stupid thing!" said he, and laying

down his pole, began to look at the tree with a climber's eye, while the malicious Poll shifted to a higher branch, and croaked out—

“That boy Wyld!”

“Just you wait till I come to you, and I'll make you be quiet;” and then the boy spat on his hands, an action which Miss Telfer actually beheld without disgust, and bid Jane run to fetch Poll's cage, if haply the wanderer might be tempted to return to it.

“Take care and don't hurt him!” she called out as the boy began to swing himself up the tree. But Poll intended to have his fling while he was about it, and, allowing his pursuer to get just near enough to be confident of success, he, so to speak, weighed his anchor and sailed deliberately across to the next tree. Nothing daunted, the boy Wyld slipped down and prepared to follow him to his new fastness.

“Oh, Johnny, dear, catch him and I will give you this!” cried Miss Telfer, holding up sixpence—she meant it to have been half a sovereign, but the smaller sum which she had produced in her agitation was quite enough for the encouragement of the boy Wyld. To tell the truth, he had not looked forward to any reward; virtue is its own reward to boys when chasing birds or beasts is in question.

“All right,” said he, with a grin, and resumed his pursuit.

Again Polly gave him the slip, and again he followed the provoking bird, which had the sense not

to go far away from home, but flapped about in its mistress's garden, perching now on one stunted tree and now on another, but always taking care not to come within reach of its importunate friends.

It was an exciting scene. A slight shower had begun to fall, but, heedless of it, the distracted Miss Telfer, holding up her dove-coloured dress, hopped over the wet grass, and vainly reproached and besought her erring favourite. Behind her came Jane, bearing the great gilt cage with its door enticingly open, and, *chuck-chucking* sweetly, endeavoured with no better results to charm down the perverse parrot. In the rear stood careless Kitty, who, seeing her mistress's countenance more in sorrow than in anger, had ventured forth to assist at the proceedings with ejaculations of deep concern. Idle servant-maids from the other houses had taken the excuse to leave their work and come out to look. Children and ladies watched from the back windows all round. For the moment the whole neighbourhood was interested in the boy Wyld's prowess.

At last Poll was caught napping. When his pursuer was close upon him, he delayed too long to be off, and when he did flap his wings he found himself hard put to it in the leafy bunch of a pollard lime. Then there was a quick shoving aside of the branches, and the boy's hand closed upon the bird's neck. It struggled, screeched, and tried to bite him, but he held fast to Polly, not to the tree. Finding his

footing insecure, he dropped down with the parrot in his hand, and only let it go when he fell on the ground and sprained his ankle.

“Brute!” was the boy Wyld’s exclamation of pain, and Polly, amazed, alarmed, and indignant, bounced right into the familiar shelter of his cage, and was promptly secured by joyful Jane and her mistress, who, however, ceased rejoicing when they found that their young ally was hurt.





CHAPTER III.

TWO or three hours later John Wyld was lying on Miss Telfer's best sofa in the drawing - room, where the blinds were drawn down to keep him cool; his injured foot rested on the most daintily-worked cushion in the house, and opposite him, at the other side of the room, the re-captured parrot brooded silent and sulky in his cage. Dr. Wyld had been sent for in haste, had ordered leeches, and done what else he could to reduce the sprain. He wished to take his nephew home, but this Miss Telfer, in the exuberance of her gratitude, would not hear of for a moment. So there the boy lay in state, surrounded by pictures, story-books, biscuits, jelly, preserves, wine, and whatever else of refreshment for mind or body Miss Telfer's establishment could furnish, and, the smart of the leeches set apart, was

having rather a good time of it in this novel experience of laziness and luxury. Miss Telfer anxiously hovered round him; she had not even allowed herself to be driven away at the sight of the leeches. She had banished the starling and the cockatoo to the top bedroom, and ordered the abodes of her various finches to be covered up lest their twittering should annoy the patient; she kept pressing him to eat or drink, and worrying him with reiterated praises of his gallantry and obligingness; in fact, she had been doing everything she could think of to make up to the boy Wyld for the injuries she had been the means of bringing upon him. And with heroic resolution she was now nerving herself to an ordeal requiring far more courage than her young friend had shown. He should learn how greatly she had wronged him. The leeches had been taken off, the foot bound up, Jane had gone out of the room, and Miss Telfer took a seat beside the sofa and prepared to unburden her overflowing heart.

"Take some more jelly, John," she began earnestly. "You can't think how much I am obliged to you. You don't know how fond I am of that naughty parrot."

"It's no matter," said the boy Wyld, awkwardly.

"Shall I give you one of my birds? You may choose any one you like."

"No, thanks. I don't care for keeping birds. I wish there were no birds in the world, because then

nobody would blame you for bagging their eggs," he said, taking up the thread of an old argument between them ; but Miss Telfer was in no mood to argue now.

"Oh, John, what a gallant little fellow you are ! If you only knew how I felt when you tumbled down !"

The object of this praise looked uncomfortable, and the parrot seized the opportunity to add his mite to the conversation. "That boy Wyld ! I want my dinner."

"Hush, Polly !" cried Miss Telfer, with as much authority as she could assume. "And now, John," she went on, "I am going to tell you a secret."

Her tone was decidedly alarming, and the boy Wyld fidgeted about on the sofa. He was not used to confidential *tête-à-têtes* with ladies, and when they got to telling him secrets, he might well be disquieted.

Miss Telfer's voice sank almost to a whisper, and she turned her head away. "*It was I who fired that squib !*"

"What squib ?" asked the boy Wyld, with genuine surprise.

"Oh, don't you remember ? They said it was you, but it was I. I threw it out of the window to frighten the cats."

"You !" cried John, and seemed struggling with a grin. "I remember now. Did you do it ? What a joke !" The rude boy almost laughed outright.

"Yes, John. But I assure you I did not mean to

get you into trouble, and I have never passed a day without feeling bitterly the injustice done to you."

"It's no matter. I had forgotten all about it."

"But I did not. I heard you had been punished, and I have been longing for an opportunity of confessing the truth; but I could not do it, I was so afraid of what people would think. Oh, John, John, what wicked hearts we have!"

The boy Wyld, without quite understanding it, saw that Miss Telfer was deeply moved, and tried to comfort her in his rough way.

"What's the good of talking about it, Miss Telfer? It can't be helped now. I didn't mind much."

"Noble boy!" exclaimed the lady. "But not another moment shall you rest under this imputation. Every one shall know how badly I have behaved to you."

The boy began to get an insight into her trouble now.

"Look here, Miss Telfer," he said, "you don't want people to know who did it. You needn't tell them."

"But think of your character! Oh! I can't be so unjust."

The boy Wyld smiled when he thought of his character.

"I don't care a button. Don't you say a word about it, Miss Telfer, and I'll never tell."

"Oh, Johnny! I have never done anything to deserve such kindness from you!"

"Yes, you have. You used to give me biscuits and things when I was a little kid."

"I never knew a boy could be so good-hearted!" exclaimed Miss Telfer. "People say you are rough and noisy and mischievous, and—but, Johnny, you may be sure I will never say so again. You must have been calumniated."

The boy Wyld did not know what to say to these compliments, so he said nothing, but scratched his head, which at that moment actually seemed a graceful action in Miss Telfer's eye.

"Johnny, dear, if you wish to bring boys to play cricket in front of the house, I won't object any more. And you may climb into my garden as much as you like—only please don't meddle with Poll, for his temper is not very good, poor thing!"

"I don't want to climb into anybody's garden when I can get fellows to play with," said John; then there was an uncomfortable silence which Miss Telfer broke after a minute.

"Johnny, tell me this. Why is it that with such a brave, good heart, you will be so—so—so—you know what I mean—you are always being found fault with?"

"I don't know that I am worse than other fellows," said the boy, doggedly.

"Oh! I am sure you are not. But people complain that you are always idling about, and doing mischief—I hope you are not offended, dear, at my

telling you so—and they say you are often beaten at school because you don't learn your lessons."

"Well, Miss Telfer, I don't see the good of learning lessons," said the boy, in a sudden burst of confidence. "Uncle says I am to go into a stupid office in a year or two, and sit on a stool all my life, I suppose; so I may as well have some fun while I can. I can write pretty well and do sums, and I don't want anything else for an office, you know."

"You must remember, my dear boy, that your uncle knows best what is good for your future welfare."

"No he doesn't. I am certain there is only one thing I shall ever be fit for."

"And that is—"

"A sailor!" cried the boy, with sparkling eyes. "Oh, Miss Telfer, I have longed to go to sea ever since I was able to read, and I shall never be happy unless I go. I asked my uncle to let me go to school on a training-ship like young Catesby—you know the Catesbys, Miss Telfer?—and if he would only let me go, I would work like a horse—see if I shouldn't! But he says it would cost too much, and then there would be the money for apprenticing me, you know; so there's nothing for me but the office, unless I run away and become a cabin boy. But don't say another word about it, please, Miss Telfer. It makes me mad to think of it, when there's no chance of my going to sea. And there's no use talking of what can't be

helped, is there, Miss Telfer? I say, what a row there was when you let off that squib! Oh, I forgot, you don't want me to speak about it."

"To me as much as you like, my dear. But if you could—if you really don't mind—if——"

"All right! the people have forgotten all about it; it doesn't make much difference to me. I won't tell."

"You really, never, *never* will——"

"There! I've promised," said the boy Wyld, laying his not over clean fist on the table.

"Oh, Johnny, I can't tell you under what an obligation you have put me. Only say what I can do for you—how I can show my gratitude—is there nothing?"

The boy Wyld hesitated.

"No,—yes. Well, there's one thing."

"Do tell it me!"

"Please, Miss Telfer, I wish——" the boy Wyld stopped and the lady encouraged him to go on.

"Then I wish you wouldn't call me Johnny."

"My dear Johnny, I never will again!" cried Miss Telfer, and to his confusion she kissed him, and ran out of the room to conceal her emotion.

That same evening Miss Telfer was again closeted with her counsellor Dr. Grey, in whom her confidence had not been wholly shaken even by his unlucky advice on the cats' question.

"So you say you take a great interest in this lad, and wish to place him at your expense on board a training-

ship school, to be turned out as a midshipman in the merchant service?"

"Yes, I should like him to serve the Queen, but I understand he must pass an examination to get into the navy; and I am afraid he doesn't like examinations."

"Are you prepared to pay, say fifty pounds, for him, for two or three years, and then perhaps as much as premium to the owners of the vessel he sails in?"

"Yes," said Miss Telfer. "Even more, if necessary, for Heaven has blessed me, doctor, with the good things of this life, and——"

"Excuse me. Is the boy you speak of bold, active, sensible, good-tempered?"

"Oh yes!" cried Miss Telfer enthusiastically, and was about to enlarge on the merits of her *protégé*, but the doctor, who was pressed for time, as usual, cut her short.

"Is he idle at school and a nuisance to his friends at home?"

"I am afraid he is," admitted Miss Telfer.

"Are you sure he really wishes to go to sea, and understands the hardships of such a life?"

"Quite sure. He says he will never be happy unless he goes."

"Has he any other prospects?"

"No."

"Then, Miss Telfer, by all means send him to sea;

and your generosity will probably be a great benefit to the boy himself, and to all who have to do with him."

"But the danger!" said Miss Telfer, taking up another side of the question.

"Danger! Pooh, pooh! my dear madam. Ladies never believe in dry figures, or I could show you by statistics that a sailor has a greater chance of a good long life than—a doctor, for instance. The danger of tumbling overboard, or being knocked on the head by savages, isn't half so great as the danger of catching infectious fever, or over-eating oneself, or ruining one's nervous system by too much brain-work, or too much strong tea at home. It seems a terrible life to you and me: I confess I would never cross the Channel, as a first-class passenger, if I could help it. But, luckily for the interests of commerce and civilisation, nature has provided a certain proportion of the male population with strong stomachs, rough skins, obtuse senses, and no nerves to speak of; and when boys of this species declare they can settle to nothing else, they are clearly meant to minister to the comfort and convenience of the rest of the community by taking themselves off to sea and expending their superfluous energy in the toils and hardships of a sailor's life. So let him go, and be thankful there are such lads and such ways of getting rid of them. If all the world were sea-sick creatures like you and me, I should like to know what you would do for cockatoos and canaries, Miss Telfer."

“Oh, thank you, Dr. Grey!” chirped the good little lady, and flew homewards with her mind made up.

It may have been four years or so later that I was passing through Westgate one afternoon, and saw knocking at Miss Telfer’s door a sturdy young fellow, dressed in unmistakable blue clothes with brass buttons, and bearing in his hand a cage that contained two gorgeous parroquets. I thought I had seen him before, and when I came to look hard at his cheery bronzed face, who should he be but the boy Wyld!



A MYSTERY;
*OR, THE YOUNG PHILOSOPHER AND THE STRANGE
PHENOMENON.*



A MYSTERY.

LORD Augustus Surfoy, third son of the Marquis of Rathmore, was a schoolboy, but, you will understand, a very superior schoolboy. He was high up in a well-known public school, he could write Latin verses on any conceivable historical or moral theme, he had a turn for science, he read the *Times* and the *Saturday Review* regularly, he talked about the spirit of the age, he already looked forward to being a statesman and a man of letters; in short, he was very well satisfied with himself and the circumstances under which he had been lucky enough to be born into this world of discontent and imperfection.

But neither rank nor learning will put us out of the reach of the risks common to mortality. Fever, for instance, slips in by the door, or the drains, of lordly hall and humble hut alike, and this is what happened to young Lord Augustus soon after he had

attained the height of his present ambition by being chosen into the football team of his school. He was laid up all the Christmas holidays at his father's house in London, where, of course, he had the best of nursing and the most expensive of doctoring. And as soon as he was well enough to be moved, his anxious and affectionate mother took him off to Rathmore Castle, close to the town of that name, which, as everybody knows who knows geography, is on the coast of Ireland, and the air of which, as Lady Rathmore firmly believed, is unsurpassed for its salubrity.

Then came a pleasant and lazy period in the life of our hero, during which he had nothing to do but to get better, and to make up the arrears of eating into which he had fallen during his illness. Nothing is so delightful as the sensation of recovery from a fever, when dry toast seems a delicious banquet, and our prudent friends have to lock away cold beef from us with as much solicitude as if they were concealing a brandy bottle from a drunkard. When we have youth, quinine, a good constitution, sea air, and the best of nourishment on our side, the fever soon has itself put to the right-about. And by the time that the first primroses peeped out, our patient found himself so much better that he began to feel tired of the dulness of Rathmore, and to wish himself back at school again.

One day he was yawning over the local paper, the

chief columns of which were devoted to chronicling the arrival of a new steam fire-engine that his mother had just presented to the town. There had been a bad fire in Rathmore; the old fire-engine was found to be of so little use that the flames had threatened to endanger the whole town; Lady Rathmore had accordingly made this New Year's present to her neighbours, and the good folks were now cackling over it like a hen with one chicken, and lauding, as good reason was, her ladyship's well-known generosity. Augustus was pleased to see his mother so well spoken of, but he was too much a boy of the world to excite himself over a fire-engine. So, as I say, he yawned, and found himself thinking how he should spend the afternoon.

Why should he not go for a good smart walk on the hills? The day was damp and cold, but he had grown quite strong now, and felt sure that a little wet could not hurt him half so much as a little exercise would do him good. He had always been fond of walking, so without more ado he put on his football boots and set forth to the moors, which lay for miles and miles round the castle in almost every direction.

Soon he was stretching his legs upon the low hills with all the energy of a convalescent. It is when one has been recently lying on a sick bed that one tastes the full pleasure of feeling the fresh breeze in one's face, and the soft turf under one's foot. Augustus so thoroughly enjoyed his walk, that he was led on

further than he had intended, and only thought of turning back when it began to rain. It had, indeed, been raining after a fashion all the afternoon, but a slight drizzle goes for nothing in that part of the country; now, however, the drops grew larger and thicker, and the pedestrian became aware that he was likely to be wet through long before he could get home. Not that he cared much for that, since at the age of seventeen a wet jacket is rather a joke than otherwise to all well-constituted minds. But it was growing dark; he had lost sight of the sea and all other landmarks, and he was not quite sure if he could find his way back to the castle. All he could do was to turn his face in what he imagined to be the right direction, and trudge on manfully through the pelting rain, hoping before long to fall in with some native who would put him on the right track.

Lord Augustus was rather short-sighted, but this mattered the less, as before long he found himself surrounded by a darkness that would have baffled the sharpest eyes. He wandered about for an hour or more without meeting any one or coming upon the least sign of habitation. He could see nothing but the dim masses of the hills rising above him; he heard nothing but the rush of some swollen torrent in the glen beneath. The sky was black as pitch; the streaming ground let him sink up to the ankles at every second step; he kept stumbling over stones and tufts of heather; his clothes were as wet as they could

be; he began to feel tired; in short, if ever a boy was at a loss, it was our hero. The rain did cease to pour down after a time, but it only gave place to a dense wall of mist which shut him up on every side, and through which he groped his way without the slightest trace to guide him.

Nevertheless, he did not allow himself to lose courage. Worse things had happened to him in his life, and would happen yet, he had no doubt. There was even something romantic and not disagreeably exciting in his situation. I can't spare room to describe it at length, nor, indeed, can one afford to throw away such a chance for a piece of fine description upon an insignificant story like this; but, if you will take the trouble to lose yourself in a thinly inhabited country any misty night, you cannot fail to see some very fine effects of darkness, and experience some curious sensations.

Augustus had a strong notion, though he could not be quite sure of it, that he was in the neighbourhood of a hill known among the country people as "The Hanged Man." The legend of it declared that a certain wicked wight, having stolen a sheep, was leading the same home by a cord, on just such a night as this, when, as he was crossing a turf wall, the cord got twisted round his neck, and the sheep strangled him by its struggles. The story may or may not have been true, but of course the ghost of this unfortunate was well known to haunt the spot, and the belated youth

recalled what he had heard of this gruesome tradition. He also recalled an essay on "Popular Superstitions," by which he had gained a prize at school the year before.

"I can well understand," he said to himself, almost in the language of his essay, "how such notions arise in ignorant and credulous minds. In such a scene as this it takes very little imagination to give a spectral form to every wreath of mist, and to people the solitary darkness with weird mysteries. If I had to spend much time alone among these hills I might find that even I myself was not proof against absurd fancies of this kind. Hallo ! what's that ? Oh, only a sheep scampering away ! Come, I needn't begin to see ghosts quite so early," declared Lord Augustus, smiling complacently at the very idea of such a thing.

But, for all his smiling, he could not feel quite comfortable, now that his mind had taken up this train of thought. It has been said that supernatural apparitions are what none of us believe in, but all of us are afraid of, sometimes, and now there was certainly something *skeary* about the scene and the surroundings, which was not without its influence upon the juvenile writer on popular superstitions. He began to wish more decidedly that he were at home, or could at least fall in with some dwelling or creatures of flesh and blood.

Then, as he was struggling and splashing on, a most extraordinary thing happened. On the hill above

him there suddenly shone forth through the mist a red glare. It was no friendly house-light; it moved rapidly along—it was coming towards him! His heart jumped into his mouth and he grasped his walking-stick. The *thing* sped on—a ball of fire, surrounded by a glowing halo—but he was too much amazed to observe it accurately. To his imagination it took the form of a gigantic fiery dragon bearing down upon him with burning eyes. For a moment he stood rooted to the spot, then involuntarily turned and began to retire. But ashamed of such weakness, he once more faced the dragon, and, to his no small relief, saw that it was moving round to his left. Moreover, he could now perceive that it was some distance off. As he tried to keep his eyes steadily fixed upon it, repressing his alarm as much as he could, though, to tell the truth, he could not restrain his heart from beating a good deal faster than usual, he stumbled over a large stone, and went souse down on his face into a wet peat-hole. By the time that he had picked himself up, recovered from his confusion, rubbed the dirt from his face, and climbed out of the hole, the terrible apparition had disappeared.

"This is most extraordinary!" he said to himself aloud, trying to reassure his troubled senses. "I cannot have been dreaming. I saw it as plainly as I see nothing now. Am I awake? Yes. A fiery dragon! Nonsense. But there it was. Pooh! Surely the fever must be coming back on me. I saw such things when

I was delirious, I think. No, it was real enough, and I am well enough, though I feel as if all my bones, and my mind too, had been shaken out of their places. But it could not have been real. I won't allow myself to make a fool of myself. I am not going to be afraid—do you hear that? It is you I am speaking to—that is, myself! Let us have no more of this delusion. Yet how could it be a delusion, when I saw it with my own eyes? Well, I am not afraid now. If it had been one of these poor ignorant people, he would have been scared out of his life. But I am all right, and to make sure of it I will just run through the lists of the axioms in Euclid."

When he had finished this task, and thus proved to himself that his reason was in no way out of gear, Lord Augustus was nevertheless more anxious than ever to get away from a spot haunted by such curious phenomena. And now he began to be aware of the roar of a waterfall close by, to which, while the dragon was before his eyes, his senses had paid no attention, though it was loud enough to drown any other sound, if sound there had been on the lonely moorland. In this waterfall he believed he had a landmark, and once more addressed himself to the task of finding his way in the darkness. In a few minutes he saw before him a tall, dark form rising in the mist, and started back with a readiness which showed that his nerves were not yet satisfied as to the non-existence of the supernatural. But another look

discovered in this object nothing more alarming than a telegraph post; and he was rejoiced to find that he had at last come upon a high road. Here, too, was a bridge which he recognised, and knew that there was nothing but two or three miles of a familiar turn-pike between him and home.

And now, as he trudged along the welcome foot-path, he could afford to smile at the experience through which he had just passed, and took himself to task for having been at all perturbed by what he had seen in the mist; though it was only a quarter of an hour ago, he already began to have a very misty notion of what he had seen. Laughingly he repeated to himself the lines of a transatlantic poet—

"Do I sleep, do I dream,
Do I wonder and doubt?
Are things what they seem,
Or are visions about?"

"After all," reasoned our dripping philosopher, "the explanation is no doubt very simple. One has heard of the will-o'-the-wisps which are so often seen flitting about marshy places. In our Irish peat-bogs the same phenomenon is naturally produced on a larger scale, and, magnified through a damp mist, might well alarm any traveller whose mind is not fortified by the lessons of science. This was the very subject I treated in my essay; now I know by experience how easy it is to mistake a gaseous exhalation for a fiery dragon. What a blessing it is to live in

the nineteenth century! My respected great-grandfather would have had a blood-curdling story out of this adventure, to tell to the end of his life. I think I could turn it to better account by writing a scientific paper on it."

Lord Augustus, young as he was, had no small ambition for literary distinction, so he eagerly turned over this idea, till it took firm hold of him. As soon as he got home he would put down rough notes of what had happened while it was still fresh in his memory; he would read up the subject; he would employ his leisure in making an essay on it, founded on personal experience, which perhaps might attain the distinction of being accepted by some good magazine; in any case, he was sure to have it printed in the local paper; then he would send copies to his friends at school, and win great *kudos*, as a fellow who had faced a fiery dragon and had not lost his senses or taken to his heels, but had observed and analysed it by the calm light of reason and science.

With this project growing in his mind he reached the bounds of the demesne, and hurried up the short avenue which led to the castle. His mind was full of the proposed essay. He would set to work at it as soon as he had changed his clothes and had a cup of tea, asking his mother to excuse him from dinner.

He entered, and was passing through the hall, when at a window commanding a view of the high road, he saw his youngest brother kicking and struggling in

the arms of the nurse, who was vainly trying to persuade him to come away from this post of observation. Impatient as Augustus was to record his strange experience, he stopped to say a word or two to the little fellow.

"Now then, youngster, what's the matter? Why don't you go to bed like a good boy?" he cried out, making no doubt that at three years old he was always good, and never failed to go to bed quietly at the proper time.

"Want to see firegee. Bring back firegee, Gussy!" screamed the nobleman in petticoats, clinging to the carved window-sill with obstinate little hands.

"My sweet infant, I haven't the slightest notion what you are talking about," said his big brother, whose mind was filled with something more important than a child's fancies.

"He means the fire-engine, my lord," explained nurse. "There has been a fire at some village over the hills, and they telegraphed to Rathmore for the engine, and it went rattling past not an hour ago all blazing and fizzing, and your brother can't get it out of his head."

"Oh!" said Lord Augustus as a light dawned upon him.

"Did 'oo see firegee, Gussy?" exclaimed the child in great excitement.

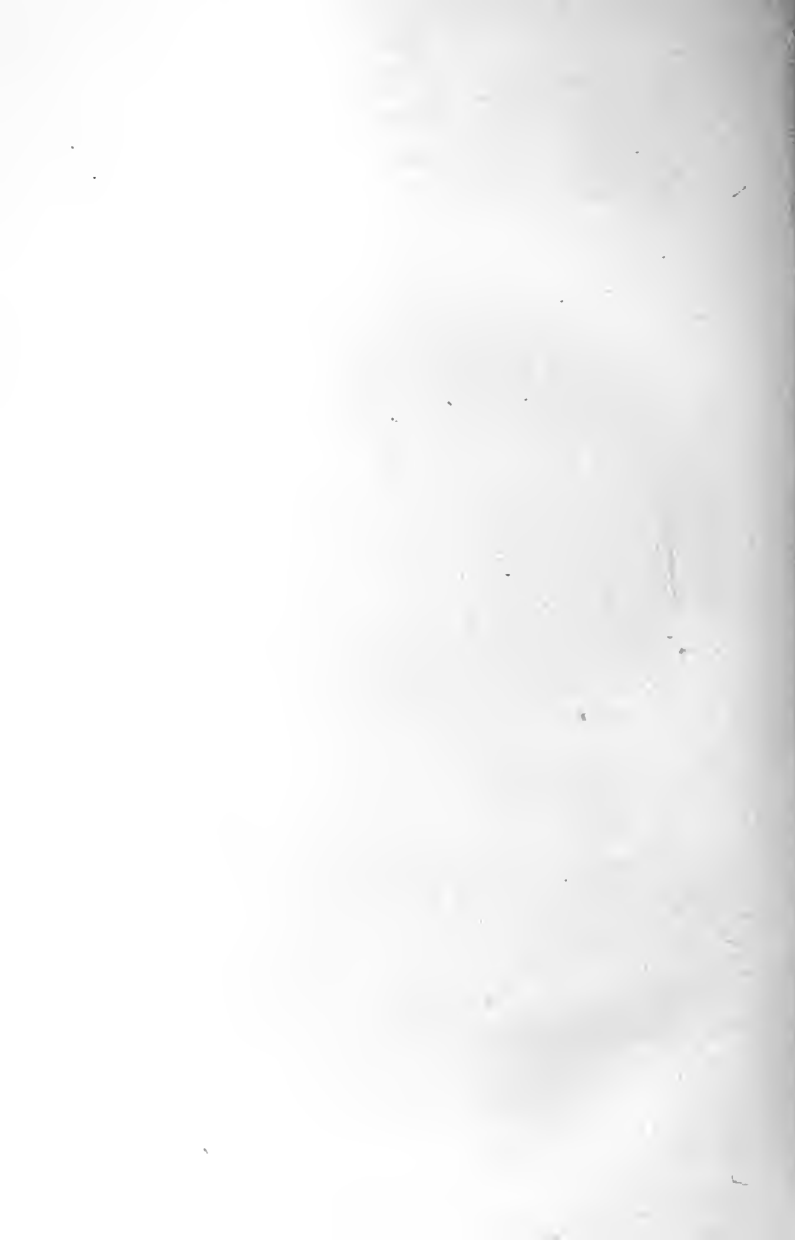
"Yes, I think I saw it," said his brother, and went upstairs to change his clothes—but not to write his

essay. He was glad he had let no one know how very acute he had been in accounting for the fiery apparition. For you see there is such a thing as being in too great a hurry to think we have got to the bottom of mysteries.



THE PENITENTS.

A STORY WRITTEN ON FOOLSCAP.





THE PENITENTS.

CHAPTER I.

THERE was a boy at school with me who, both from his appearance and his behaviour, had the reputation of being a very odd character. He had a heavy, expressionless face, a mouth always open as if to catch flies, and small, deep-set eyes, almost as invisible as those of a prize pig. His figure and dress were equally unprepossessing. His long and awkward limbs constantly outgrew his clothes, which, to begin with, were not of the best fitting; but if the most skilful tailor in the world had undertaken to disguise his deficiencies, he was one of those fellows who never can be made to look tidy. His garments, ill-matched, stained, and patched, always seemed to have been huddled on at random; his boot-laces were for ever hanging about his heels; his neck-tie was like a badly knotted rope; his linen had the secret of being crushed almost as soon as it was put on; his buttons

were in a constant state of disagreement with their corresponding holes; and as for soap and water, his dislike of such worldly vanities was only too conspicuous. The more ragged, unkempt, and unwashed he was, the more at ease he seemed to feel; he was a lazy, sit-still sort of a lad, and after a fashion had a great notion of comfort. It was understood that in cold weather he was wont to supplement his ordinary clothes by stuffing newspapers beneath his waistcoat; and when he was seen looking unusually blue and shivery, with his great hands covered with chilblains and two or three inches of wrist sticking out of the too short sleeves of his jacket, it was a great joke open to the smallest boys in the lowest form, to ask him whether he had on the *Times* or the *Standard* that morning; while some facetious youth would tell him that to go about in nothing but a *Punch* or a *Chambers' Journal* would give him his death of cold. On one occasion, being examined, he actually was found to be stuffed throughout with sheets of foolscap which had been used at an examination. This original was called Thomas Capper, but he could not be expected to escape some nickname alluding to his peculiarities, so, after the last-mentioned episode in his history, he was christened Foolscap, and known by that name all the rest of his schooldays. It was generally understood that Foolscap was "not quite right" in his head.

This poor lad should never have been sent to a

large school, for schoolboys are apt to be sadly cruel and thoughtless towards faults such as his, and the effect of their rough treatment is often to crush all spirit and self-respect out of a character already too deficient in this respect. Yet our queer Foolscap was not easily to be crushed. Though not very wise, he was a philosopher in his way, inasmuch as he took things very coolly and pursued his own eccentric courses without seeming to care much for other people’s opinion. I remember one amusing instance of the stolidity that stood him in such good stead in the many trials which would have made another boy’s life miserable. At dinner, some fellow who was helping a roly-poly pudding thought fit to send Tom Capper the end piece with no jam in it, which was considered among us a high injury and insult not to be put on any person of importance. When the despised portion was set before him, Foolscap took it on his fork, and held it up for public examination, with such an unconsciously comical look of protest and disapproval, that all the fellows at that end of the table burst out laughing, and so would you, if I could give you any idea of his air and gesture as we saw him. Unfortunately, our master, Mr. Vialls, saw him also, his attention being called by the unusual outburst; and he said sternly—

“ Capper, will you speak to me after dinner? and in the meanwhile behave yourself as like a gentleman as you can.”

“Very well, sir,” said Foolscap calmly, and once more addressed himself to the book he had been reading before he was thus interrupted in his studies.

After this we looked at him with the interest one takes in a pig marked out from his companions for killing, and we were not a little surprised to see him apparently as unconscious of his imminent fate as the pig is of the butcher. Mr. Vialls was known to be very strict about orderly behaviour at table, and to *speak* to him was a euphemism for an interview the prospect of which would effectually take away the appetite of most boys. But Foolscap did not put himself out. Setting to work on his unsavoury share of the pudding, since better might not be, he proceeded to eat it with the utmost deliberation, at the same time devouring his book, a mouthful and a sentence time about. It was a book of Natural History, I think, for our friend was fond of promiscuous reading, though he was supposed to remember very little of what he read; anyhow, we conceived a certain amused admiration for a boy who was able to give his mind to any book at such a time, and to eat suet pudding steadily with the sword of Damocles, so to speak, hanging over his head.

Grace was said, and most of the company rushed off to their various avocations without delay. But the doomed Tom sat down to finish his pudding quite at his ease, and two or three of us hung near the door watching him. Now he proceeded more slowly

than ever, keeping each morsel suspended for a minute on the way to his open mouth, while he digested the description of a camel or a dromedary. He seemed not to be in the slightest hurry; and it was only to be hoped that Mr. Vialls was of the same mind. Regardless of the clatter of plates and the bustling of the servants around him, he went on enjoying himself in his own fashion, till at last he came to the end both of his chapter and his plateful, whereupon he shut up the book, turning down a leaf to mark the place, and after carefully clearing off the last crumbs of the pudding which had brought him into trouble, rose and shuffled away leisurely as if to keep an ordinary engagement.

But when some of us asked him later in the day how he had fared at the hands of our strict master, he half shut his little eyes, as if trying to collect his thoughts, and said in the most matter-of-fact way—

"Oh, by-the-bye, I quite forgot to go to him."

"Well, you are a cool hand!" was the opinion of his interlocutor. "If I were you, Foolscap, I should put on my thickest suit of brown paper before old Vialls remembers, for he will be after refreshing your memory in fine style, my boy."

After all, however, Mr. Vialls, for once in a way, must have forgotten this appointment made by him, for Master Tom heard no more of the matter, and had the laugh on his side this time.

Indeed, the laugh was not always against Fools-

cap, for, with all his lackadaisical air of indifference, there were occasional flashes of sly and even spiteful humour in him, which gave some cause to suspect that he was not such a fool as he seemed, if he would only take the trouble to show it. But as a rule he played to perfection the part of butt to his sharper companions, and especially to my particular crony Lionel Mansfield and myself, who thought ourselves very fine fellows, and were pleased to air our rude wit upon this great stupid harmless lout, two or three years our senior, and yet sticking helplessly at the bottom of the form of which we were for a time moderately distinguished ornaments. Need I relate all the tricks and teasings with which we did our best to ruffle the even tenor of his life?—how we used to hide his pens and pencils for the mere fun of seeing him bite his fingers, his common way of expressing that he was troubled and at a loss—how we would half coax and half bully him into carrying our books and otherwise acting as a beast of burden for us—how we tried to torment him when engaged in his favourite pursuit of making nets, that we might have the satisfaction of hearing him appeal to us in his breaking voice that ludicrously alternated between a squeak and a growl: “Shut up, and let me do my net!” which we declared that he pronounced exactly in the tones of the scale—*do—re—mi—fa—sol—la—ci—do*; the fact being that poor Foolscap had no more music in his soul than a frog.

Enough! All selfish and thoughtless boys know only too well the many ways in which we could annoy such a tempting subject for annoyance. Let such boys take note that I, for one, am heartily ashamed now of many things which I did in my boyhood, and that I write in hope to make some of my readers ashamed of some of their doings at school while it is yet not too late to amend them.

In due time the holidays came round, and Lionel Mansfield's mother had taken a house for the summer at Torcombe, on the Devonshire coast, and I was asked to spend a fortnight there with my friend, and of course I went, and we two enjoyed ourselves to our hearts' content, bathing, rowing, fishing off the pier, scrambling on the hills, and, in short, partaking of all the pleasures of this picturesque and popular seaside resort. And two or three days after my arrival, as Lionel and I were lounging arm-in-arm down the narrow, old-fashioned High Street on our way to the Parade, where the band played, who should appear before us but Tom Foolscap, dressed in a new suit of light clothes, which Lionel at once pronounced to be made of blotting paper, and which had already contracted sundry stains and blotches. He was walking with a young lady in spectacles, whose face was otherwise an improved image of his own; but when he saw us, he left her and came up with a silly grin as his wont was.

"Hallo, Foolscap, *you* here?"

"Yes, I'm here," said Tom, stumbling back out of reach, as Lionel tried to knock off his cap by way of salutation.

Then we stood looking at each other, not knowing what to say next, till Lionel said, nodding towards the young lady in spectacles—

"I suppose that is one of the Miss Foolscaps?"

"Look here, Mansfield," spluttered out our school-fellow with unexpected energy, "you shouldn't say that. If you call my sister any of your names, I won't go with you."

"Nobody asked you, sir," quoth Lionel, and we both burst out laughing. As if a fellow like a Fools-cap could be supposed to have the feelings of his kind, and as if we cared whether or no he bestowed upon us the pleasure of his society! So Tom turned and shuffled off after his sister, and we went on our way, thinking no more of this encounter, except it might be to wonder at the presumption of such a person in coming to the same place as was honoured by our patronage.

But, after all, it was the holidays, when boys are not ill-pleased to meet their school acquaintances, especially where there is no great choice of companions; so at our next falling in with Foolschap we were more gracious to him, and allowed him the pleasure of our society, and he seemed content to be with us on such terms as he was accustomed to. Our rage at that time was for shooting. Lionel and I had each

provided ourselves with a strong catapult—a dangerous instrument only too well known to most school-boys—and a little magazine of small bullets. Thus armed, we would sally forth among the cliffs, in the fond hope of being able to kill a seagull, and our humble friend was taken with us on such excursions, to carry the bag if necessary. This appointment proved a sinecure, for we never succeeded in securing any game but a dead dog washed on shore by the tide. There were other ways, however, in which Foolscap could make himself useful. We often got him to stand and be shot at, promising him a bottle of gingerbeer if either of us succeeded in hitting him three times running. It was not bad fun, though I daresay he would have enjoyed better some other way of spending his holidays. But he did not complain, and we were not accustomed to take his feelings or wishes much into consideration. So the time went by, and my fortnight was drawing to an end only too soon.

The worst of Torcombe is the weather, for that part of the country is wont to use its watering-pot somewhat freely at all times of the year, and its visitors must lay their account to stay indoors pretty often, unless they don't mind being drenched to the skin. One wet, windy afternoon, Lionel and I, for want of anything better to do, had repaired to our bedroom at the top of the house, where, sitting by the open window in our shirt-sleeves, we were amusing ourselves

by shooting with our catapults, and compounding the refreshment of sherbet in a tea-cup. The Mansfield's house was one of a little terrace just outside the town; in front ran the high road, and beyond was the sea, and a wide view of the rocky coast on either hand. Game proved scarce that afternoon; not a cat or a bird showed itself as a mark for our skill, so we had to content ourselves with trying to hit a mile-stone on the other side of the road, and were thus engaged, when two figures hove in sight, struggling along the footway under an umbrella.

"I declare it's Tom Foolscap and his sister," cried Lionel, as they came nearer. "What a lark it would be to put a shot through that Gamp of theirs!"

"You might hit *her*," I said; and, after all, neither of us was rude enough to run the risk of hurting a young lady; so she and her brother were to be allowed to pass our battery in peace.

But, as ill luck would have it, he hung behind his companion for a minute, and stopped right opposite our house to tie up his bootlace on that very mile-stone. Then the temptation was too strong to be resisted. Both of us let fly at him, and had the satisfaction of seeing the mud splatter up from a puddle close beside the mile-stone, showing that we were not so far out in our mark.

Tom deliberately turned round and looked about to see whence these missiles might have come. But before he got his little eyes fixed on our windows we





had ducked down and kept our chuckling faces out of sight till we thought it might be safe to peep out again.

Now we saw that Tom had done with his bootlace, and was beginning to shamble after his sister, who stood some little way further on, waiting for him.

"Give him another broadside!" laughed Lionel.
"Ready! present! fire!"

Whiz went the catapults; and what was our horror to see Tom suddenly stop, reel, and stagger against the wall, putting up his hands to his head! His sister gave a cry and ran towards him. Down went both our heads quicker than before, but it was with no laughing faces that we looked at each other beneath the window-sill.

"I say! he must have been hit on the head."

"Never mind; his head is too thick to be easily hurt," said Lionel, with an affectation of indifference, but it was plain to both of us that we had gone beyond a joke this time.

We stole another look at what was going on. Tom lay on the ground, with his back against the wall, and his head drooping forward. His sister was applying a handkerchief to his temples, and bending down as if to catch what he said in a low, faint voice. No doubt he was telling her how it had happened. She turned and looked up at our windows, whereupon down again went our heads, as quick as ever a rabbit popped into its hole.

“ Shall we not go out and see what’s the matter ? ”
I suggested, in my contrition.

“ No ; what good could we do ? ” was Lionel’s opinion.
“ There will be lots of people to look after him.”

And, indeed, a small group was already gathering round the scene of the accident. Taking all care not to be seen, we anxiously watched the results of our thoughtlessness, and saw a servant-maid running out with a glass of water from one of the adjoining houses, then a couple of street boys appearing from nobody knew where to take part in the excitement, and a benevolent-looking old gentleman picking his steps across the muddy road towards the spot. Our idle afternoon’s work was about to become a matter of public notoriety ; and if Lionel felt as I did, he would have given half his holidays to be safe out of this scrape. But Miss Capper did not wish her brother to remain on the road as an object of sympathy for a staring crowd. One of the little basket carriages which stand for hire in the streets of Torcombe came rattling up at this moment. She hailed it ; with the assistance of the driver poor Tom was tenderly raised and deposited on the back seat in an apparently helpless state. Then, before the above-mentioned members of the public were able to satisfy their curiosity, the carriage was rapidly driven off, leaving Lionel and me in a state of mind which—to use the phrase so convenient for story-tellers—may be better imagined than described.

Now, boys, I have so often written for your amusement, that you must agree I have earned the right to inflict upon you a fair share of good advice, so clear the decks and pipe all hands for the moral of our story, which has a better chance of being listened to here, half-way, than when we come into port at the end of it. While you are waiting to know what was the result of our unlucky shot, I will take the opportunity of telling you that these catapults of yours are very dangerous and objectionable instruments. It is all very well to say boys will be boys—to be sure they will, but there is a difference in boys. Some boys delight in doing mischief and causing pain, and sooner or later contrive to burn their own fingers pretty severely through their silly tricks. Others, just as fond of fun and frolic, are lucky enough to have learned that no amusement is worth much, the end of which is trouble for their neighbours or for themselves. Such boys I wish all my readers to be. So I ask you at least to read my next chapter very carefully, and mark what a price my friend and I had to pay for our afternoon’s piece of thoughtless fun. If you don’t choose to profit by the lesson, and ever get into similar trouble, I, for one, wash my hands of the consequences ; and when you are learning in the way that fools must be taught, you cannot say that you were not warned by “Kind Words.” This is the end of the moral, but the story is *to be continued*.



CHAPTER II.

QH, Lionel, is he killed, do you think?" I exclaimed in horrified accents.

"Nonsense! He can't be so bad as all that. He is only stunned. He will be all right to-morrow." So my friend kept saying loudly, in the vain hope of persuading himself and me that he was speaking the truth; but his looks belied his tones, and he might as well have confessed at once that he was in a great fright.

All enjoyment was over for both of us. The more we thought over our predicament the worse it seemed, as we began to realise the consequences of what we had done. For this we were honestly sorry, but we were more honestly apprehensive when we considered what would now be done to us. Every moment we might expect to see Capper's wrathful parent arrive to demand our condign punishment, accompanied, perhaps, by the officers of justice, for it was clearly no

common injury which we had inflicted on our unfortunate schoolfellow. When a policeman came sauntering by on the road, our hearts jumped—at least, I know mine did—and our guilty consciences put the worst interpretation on a casual glance which he directed towards our house. He was going to stop—to cross the road—no! he passed on, and I drew my breath more freely. Yet I half wished it could be got over at once, seeing that it must come sooner or later. It could not be concealed that we were the culprits; Tom Capper would know that, even if no one else had detected us; and in such a serious manner, we should be certain to be called to account. Heartily we repented of our folly, and our repentance grew more acute as often as a footstep without, or a knock at the door, gave the alarm that our accusers might be at hand.

It must have been about an hour, and it appeared much longer, that we remained in this state of suspense, and still no accusers arrived. We kept ourselves in the bedroom, not knowing where else to go; and, indeed, at first we had not the courage to take counsel upon any means of getting away from our danger; it seemed the only thing to be done, to wait till it came to find us. But at last we could stand it no longer. Heedless of the weather, we stole out of the house without any very definite intentions as to how we should keep out of the way for a time. Thus, like Achilles, and a great many other unfortunates

since his day, we found ourselves wandering "sadly by the sounding shore." And the very first thing we did was to break these unlucky catapults to pieces, and sink them with all our store of pellets to the tangled bottom of the deepest pool left by the out-going tide. If we could but as easily have destroyed all the evidence that would be brought against us!

There was a cave or hole in the rocks, which we had been in the habit of looking on with great interest as a resort of smugglers in the good old romantic days that we understood to have existed at some indefinite period between the Norman conquest and our own infancy. Judging by the size of their place of refuge, they must have been rather stunted smugglers and in a very small way of contraband business, but then at twelve years of age the imagination is large enough to comprehend greater difficulties. It seemed fit that in our present plight we should seek such a shelter as this, the associations of which were thus in harmony with our own circumstances. So into the rocky recess we crept, I cannot now be quite sure whether with a certain notion of hiding ourselves from our pursuers, or of doing penance for our crime, or chiefly to escape from the pelting rain without; and there for two or three hours we crouched, uncomfortably enough to have satisfied Don Quixote or Amadis de Gaul in their melancholy madness, sitting on the slimy rock without being able to hold our heads upright, and suffering the wet to trickle down our backs with a resignation

produced by the consciousness that we had deserved worse than this. In this appropriate situation we opened our hearts to each other, and no longer feigned to be indifferent to the calamity which we had brought on ourselves.

Our ideas of justice were simple but all the more terrible. Now that I am grown-up, I know that should I be so unfortunate as to injure a fellow creature in life or limb, there would be still some chance of my being able to escape the consequences of my action. I should have a right to deny the charge, and might hire a clever lawyer to throw dust in the eyes of the jury, to bully and confuse the witnesses against me, to present, if necessary, the injured prosecutor as a malicious villain, in short to make the truth of the case look a lie for my benefit. But we were only a couple of ignorant and artless schoolboys, careless enough, I fear, about doing right, yet believing that, if we had done wrong, the only thing for it was to confess honestly when taxed by the proper authorities, and submit as patiently as might be to the punishment which found us out. We never supposed that our elders would take a more sophisticated view of the matter, or that we should get any encouragement in telling or acting a lie before a magistrate rather than a master. In this case we could scarcely escape suspicion, and to be suspected in such a serious matter was to be accused, and to be accused was, in our eyes, to be convicted, and to be convicted was—what?

That was the point on which we were much in want of information. The operations of the criminal law were unknown, and therefore appalling to us. We could only take the cold comfort of vague guesses at the magnitude of the danger in which we stood. I fancied to have read in the newspapers of some man who had got ten years at the treadmill for aggravated assault. Lionel was almost certain that a poacher of his acquaintance had been transported for life after nearly killing a gamekeeper. These vague reminiscences did not cheer us up. I preferred to dwell on the thought that if Capper got better soon, we might be let off with the option of a fine; I had heard the phrase used by my father, but could not recall the facts of the case to which it referred. Poor Tom Capper—we hoped in any case that he would get better soon! We did not call him Foolscap now; his misfortune seemed to entitle him to be thought of with respect, and spoken of by his real name.

“They never hang fellows under fourteen; I am sure they don’t,” broke out Lionel, suddenly and unconnectedly, putting his head close to mine, and then looking away again, as if afraid of what he had said. He was answering a thought rather than a speech of mine, and I drew a long breath. Then we both sat silent for a little, listening to the mournful sound of wind and waves without, and to the drops splashing dismally on the rock within. It was the gloomiest afternoon of my little life.

But our own thoughts were not agreeable enough to be long indulged; rather, like two shivering wretches, we were fain to huddle our minds together to keep a little spark of warmth in them. Presently we found ourselves discussing the matter in its surgical aspects, according to our lights. We agreed that the poor fellow had fallen senseless on the road, but of what injury this might be the symptom we were in some doubt. Lionel mentioned concussion of the brain, a case of which had come under his own observation, that of a boy who was struck on the head by a cricket ball, and had to have all his hair shaved off, and was not allowed to do any lessons for nearly a year afterwards. This last feature struck us as a favourable one, for we were sure Tom Capper would bear no malice on account of any hurt which procured him such an agreeable form of cure. My accomplice smiled feebly when I suggested that poor Tom had not much brain to be seriously injured; I had scarcely said it before I felt that this was not an occasion for joking, and hastened to make up for my want of sympathy by opining that our victim had perhaps had one of his eyes knocked out. But this supposition called up such a ludicrous picture of his face with the additional blemish of having only one eye, that I again felt it to be out of place, and gave up speculating on the precise nature of Tom's wound. It was only too clear to us now that a lead bullet could not violently impinge upon the thickest skull

without doing considerable harm. If we had but thought of that before !

Then came moral considerations. We careless, rattle-brained urchins, had been suddenly sobered. If I were making up a story such as I have read in so many good little books, I would represent Lionel and myself as repenting in due form, and giving utterance to the most correct and elegantly expressed sentiments, but we didn't. Yet if some preacher or teacher had been able to put our thoughts into words for us, they might have proved not unedifying. Indeed, I think we said to each other more than boys usually say in such a strain, and more than I choose to repeat here. One thing we promised ourselves : if Tom Capper got over this accident, we would not only never tease him again, but would do our little best to protect him against all ill-usage. Other good resolutions we made, openly or inwardly ; the wind was blowing hard at the time, and such resolutions are easily carried away, but it may be that we kept some of them.

As evening drew on, the cold and wet made us consider that no dungeon could be much more uncomfortable than our present place of voluntary confinement. So we concluded to go home and face it out, even if *it* might mean being haled off to prison without our tea or our night-shirts. We drew our cramped limbs out of the cave, and slunk back by the wet sand, on which the tide was now as low as our spirits.

We half expected to find the local police on the watch for us at the entrance of the town. It would not have astonished us to see the walls placarded with a bill offering a reward for our apprehension. The few persons we met seemed to look at us curiously, as if informed already of our offence. So with downcast looks we made our way along the less frequented side of the road. All the spirit had gone out of us as completely as the starch had been washed out of our collars.

We arrived unchallenged at the Mansfield's house, and nervously presented ourselves in the drawing-room. Somewhat to our surprise, no one had a word to say to us about what had happened; Capper's friends had not yet brought their complaint. It was no unusual thing for us to come home wet and late. It was, however, unusual for either of us to miss the hour of tea, and still more remarkable that we then should not be eager for that of supper. We affirmed that we were not hungry, and Mrs. Mansfield, at once suspecting that there was something wrong, discovered that we both looked pale. A cross-examination followed, in which neither Lionel nor I would confess to unripe plums, and stood still more steadily out against the charge of surreptitious cigars, suggested by Lionel's elder brother. His mother, therefore, summarily convicted us of having caught some sort of cold, and condemned us both to appropriate remedies. She was a believer in homœopathy, and never went from

home unprovided with a store of little pills with big names. In the present case she thought right to administer spirit of camphor upon a lump of sugar, and there was another drug which we were to take the first thing in the morning. I submitted readily to her prescription, as it gave me an excuse for going early to bed. But ah! what drops and globules could minister to the ease of a disordered mind.

I lay awake more than half the night, turning over in my restless thoughts what had happened and would happen. I mentally composed several versions of the letter in which I must inform my people at home of the dreadful cloud that had overcast my holidays. I recalled all Tom Capper's good points, how patient he was, and harmless, and how easily pleased; I thought we had indeed been a set of brutes to torment him so much. I wondered if he were at that moment tossing about in pain of body, with his sorrowing relatives standing anxiously around him, speaking bitterly of Lionel and me. Whatever might be his sufferings, I felt that I would willingly change places with him, and had for the first time some insight into the truth of a maxim, *it is better to be injured than to injure*, which I had come across in the study of that celebrated moral and philosophic author Delectus, the profundity of whose reflections is only equalled by the versatility with which he touches on every interest of life. I reproached myself for having been but too indifferent to the precepts of the good and wise—if I had

only paid more attention to my Delectus, and less to such follies as those fatal catapults with which Lionel and I had murdered sleep! He pretended to be snoring, but I believe he was as wakeful as myself. At last, when the early morning was rubbing his dull eyes and stretching himself on the eastern tors preparatory to getting up, I was able to fall asleep and have bad dreams. The wronged and wounded Foolscap sat heavy on my slumbering senses.

But I was up early, and Lionel and I were down first of all the family to get a look at the little local paper which came in that morning. With eager haste we opened it, expecting to see on every page some such heading in large capitals as FRIGHTFUL ATROCITY AT CLIFFBOROUGH TERRACE, OR, SERIOUS OUT-
RAGE UPON A YOUNG GENTLEMAN, with an account of Tom's condition and a statement that the police had a clue to the offenders. But no! there was not a word about us in the paper from beginning to end, except in the stereotyped visitors' chronicle, where we had been so proud to figure, though incorrectly, as "The Masters Mansfield (2)." Tom's accident had at least not been made public. What were his family about? Now, if I had been knocked down and rendered senseless, my father would not have let the sun go down without bringing the assailants to book.

This state of things was so strange and perplexing, and we were so uneasy, that we began to think of taking some older and more experienced person into

our confidence, and soon agreed that the best person before whom to lay our case would be Lionel's big brother Alfred.

So, after breakfast, when Alfred went into the garden to smoke his pipe, we followed him and told him our story, expecting his sympathy and advice. But Alfred was just at that age when he could not afford to show much sympathy for the tricks of schoolboys, and I am not sure he was old enough to warrant his advice as particularly valuable. Meekly, however, we submitted ourselves to his judgment. And like some other people who happen not to have made fools of themselves for the time being, he was somewhat hard upon us who had. We had made a nice mess of it, he told us more than once, as if we didn't know that already! It was a good thing we were not in jail, and serve us right too! Well, of course, we must take the consequences of what we had done, and we might depend upon it we had not heard the end of the matter. The most sensible thing we could now do would be to go right up to the Capper's house, find out how Tom was, and confess frankly our share in the business, with whatever apologies and promises for the future we could use to soften the heart of Mr. Capper senior. Otherwise, the next thing would be a summons to the police-court, and we might think ourselves lucky if we escaped that, in any case. It was mainly a question of how far Tom Capper had been injured; and after knocking him

over senseless on the road, it would only be decently civil to call and ask how he was. This was Alfred's opinion, and we were obliged to own that he seemed right, though both of us felt as if we would almost rather have visited a den of lions than present ourselves on such an errand to the family of our school-fellow.

Seeing how much we were at a loss to explain ourselves, Alfred volunteered to go along with us and help to face the indignation of the Capper paterfamilias. So off we three went straightway, two of us most anxious to have the worst of the business over.

The Cappers were staying in Dovecot Place, at the very top of the hill on which Torcombe is mainly built, and some way from our part of the town. Under the broiling sun we toiled up the narrow lanes, silently speculating as to what would be the nature of our reception. As we came near the top of the hill, Lionel and I were thrown into some confusion to meet Miss Capper coming down to the town with a little basket in her hand—for medicine perhaps! She turned her spectacled eyes on us for a moment, and the shining glasses appeared to be filled with anger and reproach; she knew too well who we were, and what we had done. We could not meet her gaze, but hung our heads in shameful sorrow.

Another turn brought us in front of Dovecot Place. And there, sitting upon the gate, was Tom Capper himself, all alive and kicking his heels against the

rails. He had a towel in his hand, and was luxuriously munching a green fig, which he had just taken from a paper bag sticking out of his pocket.

"Are you fellows going for a bathe?" he piped out in his sing-song tones, as coolly as if nothing had happened.

"Weren't you hurt, then?" I asked eagerly. "Are you all right now?"

Tom took another bite out of his fig and ruminated for a moment, then growled and squeaked forth, "Oh, I suppose you mean when somebody shot at me with a catapult. No. You didn't hit me."

"Then why on earth!—what did you go tumbling down on the ground for, like a fool?"

"For fun," said Tom in his solemnest croak, and without moving a muscle of his countenance, but away down at the bottom of his little deep-set eyes, I fancied that I could see ever so small a twinkle. "I thought you would like to think that you had hit me, you know. And my sister said it would be good fun to give you a fright."

I declare I was so much relieved to find this weight off my conscience, that for the moment I scarcely thought of the ludicrous aspect in which this unexpected turn of affairs placed Lionel and myself. But my companion in imaginary guilt was quick to feel his self-esteem wounded.

"Well, Foolscap, of all the—I never heard of such a—you are a——"

Before, however, he could hit upon fitting epithets to apply to our schoolfellow's strange conduct, his big brother, who had been roaring with laughter at us all this time, cut him short.

"I say, Lionel, if I were you, I shouldn't be in such a hurry to ask which of us the fool's cap fits best this time. Some people, you know, are often greater fools than they look, and other people sometimes look greater fools than they are."

"But who would ever have thought he was the fellow to play such a trick?"

"Will you have a fig?" quoth Tom Capper with the utmost composure, holding out the bag to us, as if to put an end to all discussion. So, since nothing better was to be done, we laughed all round, and partook of the peace offering in a friendly spirit.

After this we went off to bathe together, and for the rest of the day two of us exercised vainly much ingenuity in trying to persuade ourselves and other people that we had not really been in such a fright after all. I will not say how far our consciences prompted us to behave better towards Tom Capper for the future, but you may be sure that he held bail for our good conduct, since, if he chose to tell this story at school, we knew that we should never hear the end of it.

It will certainly be agreed on all sides that we had had a wholesome and well-deserved lesson to be more careful about what tricks we played, seeing that, in

this case, smart youths as we thought ourselves, we had missed our aim, while our accustomed butt, for all his stupidity, had managed to score a fair hit off us.



THE BENIGHTED TRAVELLER.
AN ADVENTURE AMONG THE INDIANS.





THE BENIGHTED TRAVELLER.



I WAS a youth lately set free from school and packed off to spend a summer in Canada, partly for the sake of health, partly for amusement, and partly for other reasons which do not concern the reader. I had been staying for some weeks with an uncle in the old Huron country. I had heard much of this ill-starred tribe; I had visited the sites of their once flourishing towns; I had seen bones and other relics dug out of their ancient burial-places, now covered with woods or the settlements of the conquering race. In my boyhood no reading had been more delightful to me than the works of Fenimore Cooper. Now that I was among those romantic scenes of which I had dreamt so often, my interest and imagination were excited to the highest pitch; in short, I had Indians on the brains, while as yet I had seen only two or three Indians in the flesh, and these very unsatisfactory specimens of their race,

by whose degenerate manners and appearance I was not to be cheated out of my belief in the noble and ferocious red man.

So I was glad to go on a visit to an old schoolfellow living some hundred miles further west, in a more unsettled part of the country. Here I should at last have the opportunity of meeting with some real adventures. I was not unprepared for scenes of terror and bloodshed. My fond friends at home had furnished me with a brand-new revolver for my pride and protection in these perilous travels, and they had not taken the precaution to withhold the ammunition. This weapon—dangerous in more senses than one—I had worn about me day and night, and was rather disappointed at not yet having found an opportunity for defending myself with it.

It was a long August day's journey to my friend's neighbourhood. At an early hour in the morning I was rowed across the lake to a railway track. There was no station here; but when the engine appeared I waved my hat, and it slackened speed while I hoisted my portmanteau on board and scrambled up behind into the one car for passengers which ended a long train of trucks. Then off we went along a single track, through miles and miles of primæval forest, a wilderness of mighty trees, choked up with underwood and gay with rank growth of purple and yellow weeds, along the borders of which the grasshoppers chirped so loud as to be heard above the puffing and the rat-

ting of the train. It was pleasant to sit on the back platform of the car, with one's legs swinging over the edge, feasting the eyes on this woodland beauty lit by the fresh morning sun, and catching glimpses here and there of the lake shining between the trees. At a place where there was no sign of men or cultivation we stopped for half an hour to let a train pass us from the opposite direction, and most of the passengers got out to pick berries along the line. It was quite an arcadian and romantic phase of railway travelling. Afterwards we passed through a more cleared country, which was anything but picturesque: all blackened stumps, ragged fields, and unfinished villages. And so we reached the little town where I was to take the stage for the rest of my journey. It did not start till two or three hours after the advertised time; but in Canada that is positive punctuality, and I was not sorry for the rest.

The stage was the most tedious and fatiguing part of the journey. You must understand this vehicle to be as unlike as possible to a well-appointed English stage-coach. It was a rickety waggon, covered with leather curtains, and containing sitting, or rather squeezing, room for nine persons, upon three bare planks, of which the back one was uncomfortable, the front one more uncomfortable, and the one in the middle the most uncomfortable seat that human ingenuity could devise. Luckily, I had this caravan to myself, save for a pile of parcels in the corner, and

was able to make the best of it, but bad was the best. Thirty miles of such conveyance are a sore trial for the unseasoned stranger, who soon finds himself cramped and cross, and wearier in mind and body than if he had walked all the way. I did walk some part of the way, as the stage progressed not more than five miles an hour, in spite of a great deal of whipping and shouting on the part of the driver, and there were halts on the way to change horses and deliver parcels, which gave me a start. The driver was a negro, and, like many other negroes in this free country, a sulky, uncommunicative fellow, who seemed to resent any approaches to civility on the suspicion of condescension, so that I was left mainly to my own thoughts and observations.

Our dusty road lay, for the most part, through a belt of new clearings in a rough, undulating district. On either side the view was monotonously shut in by gloomy woods full of smouldering piles where the settlers were destroying the timber. Here and there we came upon a recently built farm or a log hut, from which a group of barefooted children would come out to stare at us, or a mongrel cur run yelping after us till he was out of breath. Harvest was over, and the bare fields, with their stiff snake fences, added to the dreariness of the general aspect of the country. It seemed as if the wild beauties of nature had been spoiled, and not yet replaced by a face smiling with the associations of home and culture. But perhaps it

was the jolting that put me out of humour with the scenery. I know I was glad to come to the end of this part of my journey, and to bid farewell to a vehicle in which, if I were of a cruel disposition, I would wish my deadliest enemy nothing worse than to be carted from morn till dewy eve.

Towards dusk, as I had walked up a steep hill in front of the stage and taken a short cut across a corner of the woods, I came upon a band of hunters in real forest costume, who were lighting their camp-fire and preparing to spend the night in the open air. Much interested, I ventured to enter into conversation with these adventurous heroes, and was then somewhat disgusted to learn that they were only a party of clerks from Toronto, who had come to spend their holidays in playing at backwoods rangers. I rejoined my lumbering vehicle with a painful suspicion that, after all, there was nothing romantic left in Canadian life. I had not met a single Indian, unless it were two little black-haired imps who looked dirty enough to be of any colour, and who burst out laughing as I passed, as impudently as if they had been London street Arabs.

It was almost dark when I was set down at a little low tavern which, in large letters all along its white front, was loftily announced as THE HYPERBOREAN HOTEL. Here I learned that my friend's house was still some miles off, and only to be reached by a bad road through the woods. It seemed out of the question

to go on that night; and as the landlord, with some hesitation, said I could have a bed, I resolved to stay where I was, the more willingly as to sleep in such a place savoured of something adventurous to my inexperienced mind.

This tavern, which was the only habitation in sight, consisted of two storeys, the lower of these having two rooms—a kitchen behind, and a more pretentious apartment, which served as hall, drawing-room, bar-room, and general lounging place for the idlers of the neighbourhood. The landlord, who also appeared to unite in his own person the offices of cook, waiter, ostler, and chambermaid, was a rough, awkward fellow, who has left no other impression in my mind than a vague reminiscence of long legs and shirt-sleeves. There was one other guest, a weak-eyed and red-haired young man, whom I found to be the schoolmaster of the place, a permanent inmate of the Hyperborean Hotel, at the rate of a dollar and a quarter per week. These two were the only persons visible about the house. I afterwards learned the probable cause of this absence of custom. It was Saturday night, when, by the law of that part of the world, no liquor is allowed to be sold after a certain hour.

As soon as the stage had rattled off, and glad was I to see the dusty back of it, my host went into the kitchen and addressed himself to cooking supper. In the meanwhile, the schoolmaster and I sat in the front room, and he endeavoured to entertain me with

conversation. He was an ambitious youth, this schoolmaster, who evidently considered himself an oasis of cultivation in the mental desert of backwoods life, and was bent on showing the stranger that he knew how to talk to a man of the world. But, to tell the truth, I was too tired to pay much attention to his well-meant civilities, and my thoughts were not so much taken up by recognition of his superior information as in wishing that supper was ready.

When the meal was at last on the table, the landlord notified the fact by standing in the doorway between the two rooms and solemnly ringing a large bell, a proceeding quite unnecessary, so far as we were concerned, but no doubt meant as a tribute to the respectability of the establishment. Thus formally summoned, we went into the kitchen and sat down to tea, bacon, and fried potatoes, under the cheering influence of which I soon recovered my sociability and gave the schoolmaster cause to think that he had discovered in me a kindred spirit. The landlord sat at the head of the table, still in his shirt-sleeves, and we all got on very well together. My companions were disposed to treat me with a certain curiosity and respect as one coming from the "old country," which in Canada seldom fails as a passport to goodwill. The landlord was very inquisitive as to what my business might be in the neighbourhood; he could not conceive of any one travelling for purposes unconnected with business, and kept informing me of the excellent lots

of land and other opportunities which he could help me to. The schoolmaster, on the other hand, tried to direct the conversation to the fashionable and intellectual life of the British metropolis, of which it seemed that he was a distant admirer. He informed us, I remember, that some of the aristocracy of England dined so late as six o'clock, and appealed to me for confirmation. He also stated it—but with less confidence—to be a popular delusion on that side of the Atlantic that every commoner in England was obliged to stand up and take off his hat whenever a peer entered the room, and here again I was able to inform him that, to the best of my knowledge, he had not been misinformed. He was a curious little fellow, and you would laugh if I could recall all his pieces of information, and the complacent manner in which he enunciated them.

After washing up the dishes and raking the fire in the stove, our host announced that he proposed to leave us in the house by ourselves for the night, as he was going to visit his wife, who was lying ill at her father's, some miles off. Without further ado, he set off in his shirt-sleeves, promising to be back in time to get our breakfast "fixed." The young dominie and I lit our pipes and went outside to watch the silent flashes of summer lightning, at this time of year an almost nightly phenomenon in these parts. It was pleasant enough to sit idly in the warm darkness, listening, so to speak, to the stillness of the

woods around, broken only now and again by the distant bark of a dog or the tinkling of a cow-bell. But the effect on us both was somewhat somniferous ; we soon began to find that we had not much to say to each other, and to think of going to bed.

Just as we were about to retire I asked my new acquaintance if there were any Indians about. In the most matter-of-fact way he answered that a band of them was at that moment camped in the wood behind the house. I pricked up my ears at this news, but the schoolmaster was too sleepy to notice my desire for further information. To my surprise, I found he was going to leave the door open. When I suggested that it ought to be closed, he replied with a yawn, "Well, I guess it might as well," and gave it a push to with his foot. I certainly thought this a want of precaution when a band of Indians were so near, but I did not like to say anything that showed uneasiness, and gave him the credit of knowing what was necessary for the security of our scalps.

The schoolmaster lit two stumps of candle and led the way up a narrow staircase, ascending from the kitchen to the floor above. Here he showed me the room which had been prepared for my accommodation, and, blinking wearily, as a teacher of the rude Canadian youth must often do, betook himself to the next apartment.

Left to myself, I surveyed my apartment with no great satisfaction. It was a mere closet ; a small and

not very clean-looking bed filled half of it, and the rest of the space was almost entirely choked up by my portmanteau and by the furniture, which consisted of nothing more or less than a stool with a washing-basin on it, and an enormous drum, suggestive of anything but repose. The only attempt at ornament on the whitewashed walls was a framed and glazed certificate of membership of an "Orange Young Britons' Lodge," which further acquaintance with the country would have enabled me to connect with the drum. The floor was uncarpeted and full of knots and holes. There was a fusty smell, as if the room were not much used. Cobwebs hanging in the corners and other signs of neglect suggested, as the most charitable explanation, that the mistress had been a long time away from home.

My short candle burning down warned me that, without further examination, I must proceed to make the best of these quarters. I tried to open the window, but, to my disgust, it would not move; so I had to leave my door ajar to get as much fresh air as possible. Then, when I came to look into the bed and feel its thin, lumpy mattress and coarse sheets, I concluded not to undress, but to lie down as I was, wrapping myself in a Scotch plaid. And you may be sure I looked to my revolver and placed it carefully under my pillow. Scarcely was I settled thus, when my candle guttered out, leaving me in the dark.

Tired as I was, I could not sleep. Turning restlessly from side to side on my uncomfortable couch, drawing

long breaths, trying in vain to keep a quiet mind, I had soon worked myself up into a feverish state, in which sleep was out of the question for hours. The air was close and sultry; the lightning disturbed me even when I resolutely closed my eyes; the house seemed to be alive with rats and mice; and above the sound of their scampering, magnified by my excited senses, rose steadily and provokingly the snores of the schoolmaster, sleeping happily after the toils of his laborious week, and making his repose only too audible through the thin partition of the next room. There was a mosquito or two about, also, which caused me a good deal of annoyance.

Then I found my mind running upon the Indians, as by a resistless fascination I recalled the most horrible stories I had read of midnight attacks, of scalpings, of massacres, of treachery and cruelty. Was it possible to be at ease with the knowledge that a band of these savages was lying within a few hundred yards? I got up two or three times to bathe my hot face in water, and, looking out of the window, fancied I could distinguish the glow of camp fires in the dark woods around. Were they not at that moment, perhaps, putting on their war paint and preparing for a stealthy onslaught on this unprotected cabin. The landlord and my fellow-lodger seemed to be quite unsuspecting, and they ought to know what was really to be feared, yet—I was not accustomed to sleeping outside of a policeman's beat.

Other images of horror arose, suggested by reminiscences of European fiction. A lonely spot—a confiding traveller—an unfrequented inn—a landlord in league with brigands—a midnight assassination—an unknown grave in the depths of the forest—were those scenes and characters wholly confined to mediæval times and countries where villains were picturesquely equipped with cloaks and poniards? I had been too rash in displaying my watch and purse; I had noticed the landlord looking with greedy eyes at my well-filled portmanteau. Now that I came to think of it, he had a most forbidden, treacherous expression; and that mysterious leaving of the house, with the door open, too—what was one to think of that? The schoolmaster might be an accomplice. No; the very name of schoolmaster brought in modern associations quite out of harmony with romantic crimes. But he might easily be gagged and bound, or even knocked on the head, if he tried to thwart the purpose of the ruffians. And, by-the-bye, how about Eugene Aram?

“Nonsense!” I said to myself, sitting up, and trying to shake my wits out of this *creepy* mood. But it would have been much easier to do so if I could have forgotten that a band of redskins were at that moment prowling round the house, and that the landlord had gone out to them in such a suspicious manner.

I suppose I must have gone off into a doze for a short time, for now I had a horrible nightmare. It was the landlord in full war-paint, sitting on my chest

and brandishing a tomahawk ; then it was the schoolmaster, attired like an Italian brigand, trying to stab me through my cloak with a scalping knife ; next I fancied that I was lying out in the woods, and that a gigantic bear was devouring the deer as a cow eats grass, and was coming round presently to have a taste of me. This is what comes of bacon and fried potatoes indulged in too freely before bed-time. I may mention that the tea I had taken was probably green tea, with which Canadian inns are wont to ruin the rest of their unwary guests. After a snatch of uneasy slumber I was broad awake, and more ready than ever to entertain gruesome thoughts.

Ha ! What was that ? I could have sworn I heard heavy footsteps moving in front of the house. I leaped up, ran to the window, peered into the darkness. Nothing to be seen, but the sound was repeated. I knocked sharply on the window, to show that I was not to be taken unprepared. The footsteps suddenly ceased. Then I thought I could distinguish a low whisper and a stealthy movement on the grass. If that idiot of a schoolmaster would only stop snoring for a little !

For several minutes I stood listening with strained ears. All was now quiet, except my suspicions. I began to be certain that something was wrong, and resolved to be on the look-out, at all events. They should not catch me napping, and they might depend on it I would sell my life dearly. Trying hard to keep

cool and steady, I sat down on my portmanteau with the cocked revolver in my hand.

I had sat so for some time without anything happening, and had half made up my mind to return to bed, when again I heard the same noise beneath the windows. There could be no mistake about it now. Some one was certainly moving round the house. There came a low grunt—a curious sound, that my reading at once enabled me to identify as the guttural exclamation with which the red man calls the attention of his comrades. The perspiration stood on my brow. Should I wake the schoolmaster and inform him of our danger?

They were creeping nearer. They were surrounding the door. Horror! they were pushing it open. I could distinctly hear the slow creaking of the hinge and the tread of moccasined feet upon the floor. It was no mere imagination, for now came a loud noise beneath, as if some article of furniture had been overturned. It was a wonder that any one could be in the house and not hear it; but still the schoolmaster snored on. I drew a long breath and started up.

My resolution was taken. I need not wake my fellow-lodger. One bold man could defend the stair as well as two. Not a moment was to be lost, if an effort might yet be made to save our scalps. Grasping my trusty revolver in my right hand, and feeling my way in the dark passage with my left, I stole forth and almost stumbled headlong down the staircase.

Recovering my footing, and holding on to the rope which served as baluster, I stood about half way down the steps, looking firmly before me into the kitchen beneath, where the only light was a dim glimmer through the chinks of the stove. It was a trying moment. All was now silent as death; but, in the further corner, my eager eyes could trace a dark crouching form.

"Who is there?" I asked in a deep, determined voice, clicking the lock of my weapon to show that I was armed.

There was no answer to my challenge.

"The first man who moves a step this way shall have a bullet through his head," I continued, in a tone admirably calculated to overawe these midnight marauders.

Still no reply, but I heard something stir.

"I have six shots here, and I never in my life missed my man." This I might say very truly, as I had never had a chance. "Go out," I cried, growing bolder; "leave the house or say who you are, or I fire. I have given you a fair warning. One—two—three!"

The dark figure moved and sprang towards me. With a hasty aim I pulled the trigger.

The flash showed me nothing, for I involuntarily closed my eyes as the pistol went off. The report rang through the house like a miniature thunderclap. It was followed by a deep groan of agony and by a

terrible crash, as if a volcano of crockery and fire-irons had burst forth at my feet. But louder than all rang the ear-piercing and heart-appalling war-whoop. Never before had I heard that fearful sound, save in my dreams; yet now, in my excitement, it seemed not wholly unfamiliar to me.

I stood as one stunned and amazed by the consciousness of having, for the first time in my life, shed a fellow-creature's blood; but I had presence of mind enough to keep the revolver pointed into the darkness with my finger still on the trigger. The schoolmaster was heard calling out in alarmed tones. I shouted to him to bring a light. Then he ran out in his night-shirt, holding a whole bunch of tallow candles—the first torch that had come to his hand. The wicks spluttered and blazed up, and the astonished dominie stood staring at me with open mouth and eyes. He was not yet wide awake, and might well be somewhat confused, but in the glow of my excitement I took him for a coward, and impatiently reached out to snatch the candles from his hand. So flurried was I that I only succeeded in knocking them down, leaving us in darkness; while overbalancing myself I lost my footing, and fell sprawling headlong down the staircase, with my revolver going off in my hand like a firework. At the bottom my fall was broken by some large, rough object—a wild beast! With a struggle and a bound it shook me off on the floor, and if my senses had

not been half knocked out of me I should have thought that my last hour was come.

When I picked myself up and the schoolmaster appeared with another light, we found ourselves unhurt. But that it was no nightmare which had thus deluded me was proved by a pool of blood into which I had fallen, wofully bedabbling my hands and face. Throughout the confusion strange cries of pain had not ceased to make themselves heard; now the light was thrown into every corner of the kitchen, and rolling on the floor we saw a *thing*—!

* * * * *

But, at whatever cost to my own feelings, I must not leave the reader in horror and mystery. Oh, why did my friends trust me with firearms? The band of Indians who had so much roused my imagination were on their way to a Methodist camp meeting. A young donkey belonging to them had got loose through the night, and, wandering down the road to the tavern, had pushed itself in, perhaps mistaking the place for a stable. The bray of that wounded ass rings in my ears to this day; and it was long before I learned not to blush at the mention of my first adventure among the Indians.





THE BITER BIT.

A TALE OF A SPIDER AND A FLY.





THE BITER BIT.

SOMEWHERE in the heart of Wales there is a little town called Llanbwlech, inhabited mainly by some hundreds of Joneses, Prices, and Williamses. An irregular heap of grey stone houses, now huddled at the foot of a bleak hill, now straggling along a clear trout stream, here and there making a show of shaping themselves into a crooked street with muddy footpaths and grass growing in the rough roadway—you can easily form a picture of it for yourself, if you have ever been in that part of the country, where there are a dozen small towns, or big villages, with names as hard to pronounce, and as like one another as two peas. But you have probably never heard its name, so far behind the times is this quiet old place, and so hidden out of the way among the hills, though within half a dozen miles all is bustle and business, the bare moor honeycombed with coal pits, and the mountain air thick with the smoke from blast furnaces and steam-engines.

It is not easy to get to Llanbwlch. A certain traveller who finally succeeded in reaching it declares that he spent a whole day in the last twenty-five miles of the journey. He travelled in four trains, as a rule ingeniously timed so as just to miss one another, for these railways seemed to be conducted on the principle of a donkey race, where the object is to take as much, not as little, time as possible in getting over the ground. At two junctions he had to wait wearily for a longer time than a moderately minded express would have taken to do the whole distance. At one station the guard informed him that there was a fine waterfall about a quarter of a mile off, and volunteered to wait while he went to see it. At another, a singular accident occurred : the train actually arrived at the very moment it was due. The engine-driver, guard, and porters clustered together in evident surprise, and appeared to be earnestly consulting as to what could be done in such an emergency. One ready wit must have suggested that matters could be set right by fooling away time in examining the tickets, which was accordingly done, and the train made up its accustomed unpunctuality. Finally, the tired traveller was turned out into a vehicle dignified by the name of a coach, but which looked rather like a compromise between a hearse and an omnibus, and which took its creaking way over such steep hills that most of the passengers were continually getting off to ease the horses ; so, as the Irishman said when he hired a sedan

chair with the bottom out, but for the honour of the thing, one might as well have walked all the way. It was soon after breakfast that he had begun this journey of no greater length than from one end of London to the other, and night was drawing in when at last he caught sight of the ancient tower of Llanbwllch church.

Such being its situation and circumstances, you may well suppose that the inhabitants of this place were an old-fashioned, easy-going folk, friendly enough among themselves, except at election times, but not taking kindly to strangers or improvements. So the above-mentioned traveller found before he had been long among them. He was a dentist, who had come to set up at Llanbwllch, understanding that there was no one in his way of business for many miles round; but he soon learned that it was not easy to extract the teeth or the prejudices of the natives. Upon his new brass door-plate his name was followed by a certain imposing array of capital letters, signifying that his skill had been duly attested by the College of Dentists, but this served him little. His diploma seemed only a cause for greater suspicion in the eyes of his new neighbours. For half a century they had had their teeth pulled out by Dr. Price; and though the old gentleman was getting rather blind, and would occasionally extract a sound grinder instead of the bad one, why he had a younger assistant who didn't often make mistakes and who never failed to give them a good satisfactory tug for their money; anyhow, they

were not disposed to trust this stranger with his new-fangled apparatus and unknown title. His very name was a suspicious one. It was John Jamieson, whereas it ought to have been John James or James Jones. They said he was a Scotchman, or at least a Yorkshireman, and were duly cautious about having any dealings with him. Unfortunately, too, his appearance was against him; he was a tall, lanky, raw-boned, awkward-looking man, with a somewhat solemn expression of countenance. The boys of the town laughed at him, and nicknamed him "Spider." The ladies discussed him with unfavourable criticism. The men simply took no notice of him or his door-plate; and malicious wits declared that his only patient was the tax-gatherer.

So for a time Mr. Jamieson did not find much business in his chosen abode. His professional exertions were not meant to be confined to Llanbwelch. He tried to form a connection in the country round about, and arranged to visit on market days the neighbouring towns of Aberhonddhu, Pant-y-coed, and Cwmmynnyd; also, by special appointment he would attend at Pendhumawr, Llanfihangelystern, Pwl-Gwchellog, and Brynecrwysfach. To perform these journeys he kept a pony, whereby hangs our tale.

This animal was a shaggy, scrubby, stumbling beast, no more adapted to conciliate public opinion than his owner, and inviting scorn and ill usage even by his sole virtue, a patient and downcast resignation, which was the fruit of much experience in the hard roads and

poor stables of life, and was fully called into play in the service of the dentist, a kind master but a heavy one. Neither of them found friends at first sight.

The field in which the said pony took such ease as was permitted him, lay beside the playground of a school. Now the boys of this school shared their parents' want of sympathy with strangers, and if they did not go the length of heaving half a brick at the new comer, after the manner said to be prevalent in the black country, the same barbarous sentiment inclined them to consider his pony as fair game for their mischievousness. Some of them set to pelting the poor beast with stones, by way of expressing their unfriendly opinion of strangers, and especially of dentists, a sort of men whom the rising generation of Llanbwelch took for cruel ogres delighting in the torture of their fellow creatures. When he found his steed thus maltreated, Mr. Jamieson complained and threatened, which did not mend matters. Thus, without meaning the least harm to any of them, the dentist became an unpopular person among his juvenile neighbours, and the innocent pony continued to suffer persecution for his master's sake as well as for the mere fun of setting him to scamper wildly about his narrow enclosure. At last it happened that one of the boys, called Howell Powell, was caught in the act by Mr. Jamieson, who spoke to the schoolmaster about it, and procured for this naughty urchin a rebuke or a punishment which served him right.

The culprit himself was not of this opinion. He saw no great harm in his having ill-used a harmless animal; but it seemed to him that the dentist had committed a crime of the deepest dye in "telling" about him and getting him into trouble. Our ideas of virtue have often a good deal to do with our own interests; when boys are aware that the tales to be told about them will not always bear telling, they naturally take a very unfavourable view of the character of a tell-tale. Such is juvenile morality, and Master Howell Powell, not much given to analysing actions and motives, mistook his private resentment for righteous indignation, and thought it almost a public duty to make this contemptible person feel duly ashamed of himself. With this intent, he and some of his cronies laid their heads together, and, as it was about the middle of February, they agreed that the best way of striking home to the dentist's conscience would be by sending him a valentine, calculated to let him know what other people thought of him and what he ought to think of himself. So Howell Powell, in company with his particular friends, Jenkins, Watkins, Jones, and Price, visited one of the chief shops of the town, in which were sold stationary, tobacco, fishing-tackle, and other miscellaneous articles, but the window of which was at this time of the year filled with valentines, chiefly of the coarse and abusive order. From these they selected the one which seemed most appropriate, representing a very unprepossessing, long-legged scarecrow of a

man riding on a donkey with his face to the tail, and having this doggrel beneath—but no, the lines shall not be quoted, for there was no wit in them except to the taste of rude and vulgar boys, such as, I hope, are none of my readers.

This gaudily coloured work of low art, after having been much admired by all the fraternity, was fastened up in a large envelope and addressed in big printed letters to the person who had been unfortunate enough to incur their displeasure, his professional appellation being caricatured by the addition to his name of the titles A.S.S. and L.L. Donkey. But now a difficulty arose. The price of valentine and envelope had been twopence half-penny, the precise sum which the young satirists had been able to raise among them; but where was the penny to come from to pay for the stamp? It seemed necessary that the missive should be delivered by hand. Then came the question, who would bell the cat, and run the risk of presenting himself at the dentist's door? Jones thought Price should do it; Price was of opinion that Jenkins would be a better messenger; Jenkins, for his part, strongly advised Watkins to take upon him this part of the plot; but Watkins did not see it in the same light. Finally, they all unanimously declared that Howell Powell, being most concerned in the matter, should go himself while the rest backed him up by looking on from a safe distance. Howell Powell did not half like the job, but when the others urged him on and accused him of

being afraid, he felt that his honour was at stake, and consented in an unlucky hour to do this doughty deed.

So now you understand how on the afternoon of Saturday, the 13th of February, these boys came to be hanging about behind a wall which commanded the front of Mr. Jamieson's house, while their leader crept up to the door, bearing the torpedo which was to explode in the dentist's home and shatter his good opinion of himself to pieces. Now that it had come to this point, Howell Powell wished that he had never entered upon the undertaking. He was a bit of a coward, and had not bargained for any risk to himself in attacking his enemy; but with the eyes of his companions fixed upon him, he could not draw back. Cautiously he approached the door, and having looked round to make sure that his retreat was safe, he prepared to fire the train.

What he should have done was this: first, slip the valentine into the letter-box, next, knock gently, then run away with all his might and main. But being a little flurried and anxious to have it over, what he did do was to use the knocker first. And by ill chance it happened that Mr. Jamieson was in the very act of putting on his hat behind the door, which he opened himself as soon as the boy had done knocking, and stood before him most unexpectedly and unopportunity.

The dentist was a very tall man; Howell Powell was a very small boy for his age, besides, he was

standing a step lower, and he felt like Hop-o'-my-Thumb confronting an enormous giant. He was too much taken by surprise to run away. In his confusion he had just presence of mind enough to pop the valentine behind him. Then, before he could make up his mind how to explain his presence there, Mr. Jamieson addressed him.

"Well, my little man, what can I do for you?"

"I have a bad tooth," stammered out Howell Powell, for he could think of nothing else to say.

"Ay, ay; that's a pity! Come in, and we will perhaps be able to make it better," said the dentist in as friendly a tone as "'*Will you walk into my parlour,*'" said the spider to the fly." And he kindly put his hand on the little fellow's shoulder, and drew him in, to the great wonder of his watching confederates.

Sorely unwilling, but not knowing how to refuse, Howell Powell suffered himself to be led into the room where the dentist drove his grim trade. The boy looked nervously round as he entered this chamber of horrors; but nothing more suspicious was to be seen than a great chair with a sliding back, such as most of us have made the acquaintance of in some unhappy half-hour of our lives. Master Howell had never been at a dentist's before, but he had heard of the instruments of torture used in such a place, and was relieved to find that they were at least out of sight.

In this chair he was now invited to place himself, and to open his mouth. He had a tooth a good deal

decayed, which, however, never gave him any pain. Mr. Jamieson fixed upon this at once.

"I see," he said, when he had finished his examination. "It is a bad tooth, indeed, but never mind; I will soon do something for it, so that it shall never trouble you any more. Now just sit still for a moment, and don't distress yourself. I shall be back directly."

With this he went out of the room, and his patient, much perturbed in mind, began to cast about for means of escape from this awkward quandary into which he had got himself. He tried the window, but could not open it. Outside he could see his friends putting their heads together to guess what was befalling him, but that was no help. He ran to the door, but Mr. Jamieson's footsteps were heard along the passage. He was fairly caught in the web which he had approached of his own accord and for his own bad designs. And his guilty conscience made him think that the letter which he held in his hand would not long escape the observation of the person to whom it was addressed; it would be opened, and then there would be a fine to-do. How could he get rid of the unlucky valentine? Hurriedly he threw it into the fire, and it began to blacken and shrivel away just as the unsuspecting dentist entered the room with a tumbler of warm water in his hand.

The first thing he did was to unlock a drawer, out of which he took something and held it mysteriously

behind his back. Howell Powell's heart sank within him, as he was invited again to occupy the chair.

"My tooth is all right now; I don't think it wants anything done to it," he said, trying to get up the moment he had sat down.

"Come, come, you are not going to be afraid when it will all be over in half a minute," remonstrated the dentist, gently holding him down with one hand, and keeping the other still behind his back.

"What are you going to do?" cried the boy, beginning to be very much afraid.

"I am going to set this tooth right for you."

"But I don't want it set right!" exclaimed Howell, struggling vainly to get up.

"Yes, yes, you do; you will be obliged to me presently, when it is all over. Open your mouth wide now. I won't hurt you more than I can help, my boy."

"Oh dear, what shall I do?" thought Howell Powell in dismay, as he saw the dentist lay down something shining, and select another instrument from his drawer, still holding the reluctant patient fast. The boy opened his mouth wide to howl, when suddenly he found it stopped by a kind of a gag which prevented him from closing it again. Then he became aware that his head was being held as in a vice, and something cold and hard was dug into his gums. He tried to cry out, but could only utter a helpless gurgle, and *OH*——; the blank may be filled up by any one who has ever gone through a similar experience.

It only lasted a second or so, and the next seemed to Howell Powell the happiest moment of his life, when the dreadful wrench came to an end and he was allowed to let his head fall over a basin, hitherto concealed, which Mr. Jamieson quickly set before him, at the same time triumphantly holding up the useless grinder, and exclaiming cheerily—"There! It's all over."

"Ugh! ugh! ugh!" was all that Howell Powell could reply, as he shed blood and tears into the basin, and wished with all his heart that he had never meddled with playing tricks on a dentist.

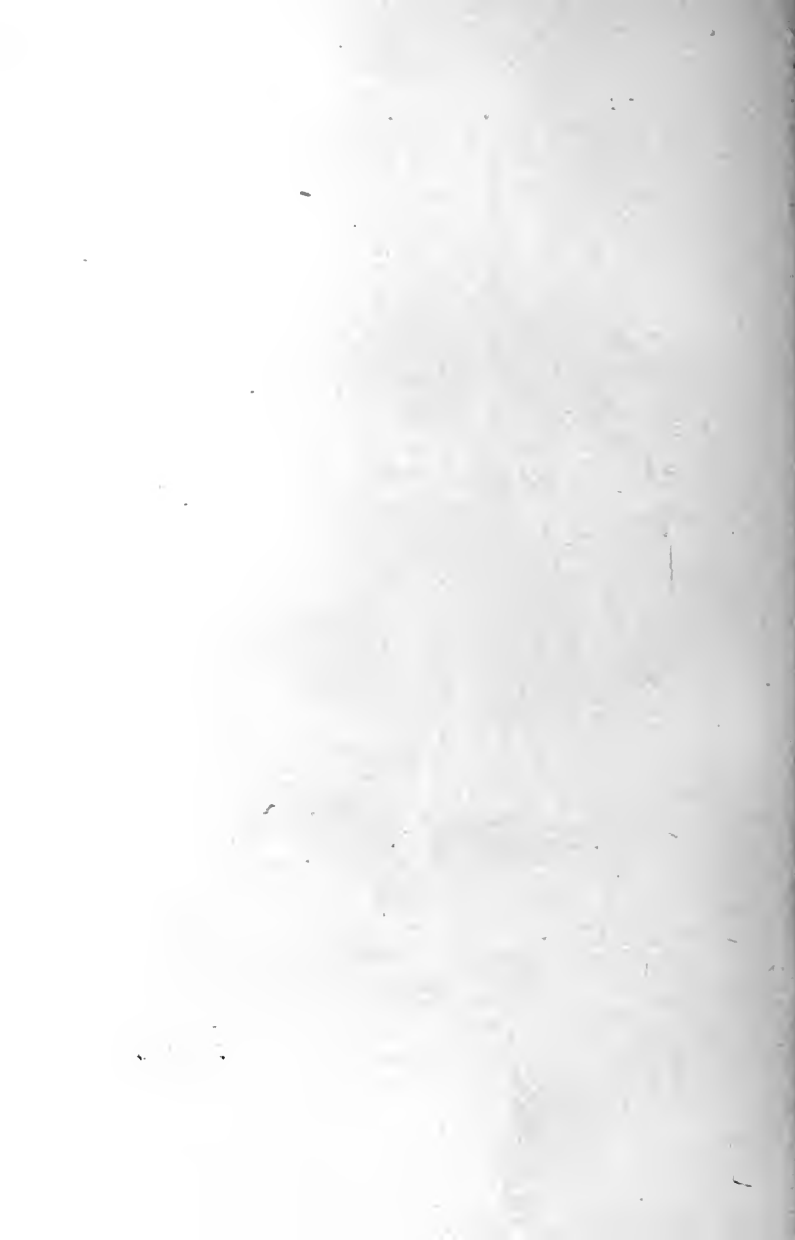
Half an hour later, Howell Powell's young friends, still waiting and wondering, saw him issue forth from the dentist's door with a handkerchief applied to his downcast countenance. But he was in no mood to meet their open eyes and mouths. Utterly refusing to gratify their curiosity, he hurried home and shut himself up for the rest of the day. Nor, though the truth of the story was more than guessed by his companions and he had to put up with being well laughed at, would he ever disclose all that had passed between himself and Mr. Jamieson. I am inclined to think, however, that they must have had some conversation of a serious and profitable kind. At all events, it is certain that this involuntary young patient of his never again joined in speaking ill of the dentist, or behaving ill towards his much-enduring quadruped.

Time passed on, and brought changes to Llanbwlech



NOTHING TO LAUGH AT!

Page 176.



as well as to the rest of the world. The Welsh are a good-natured people, and after Mr. Jamieson had been kept long enough in a quarantine of distrust, his neighbours began gradually to forgive him for being a stranger, and to find that he was a good fellow and not a bad dentist, so that he came to have a capital practice, and was able to exchange the stumbling pony for a strong sleek cob which commanded everywhere as much respect as its master. By this time Howell Powell and his companions had grown a good deal bigger. Let us hope they had also become wiser and more kindly towards man and beast.



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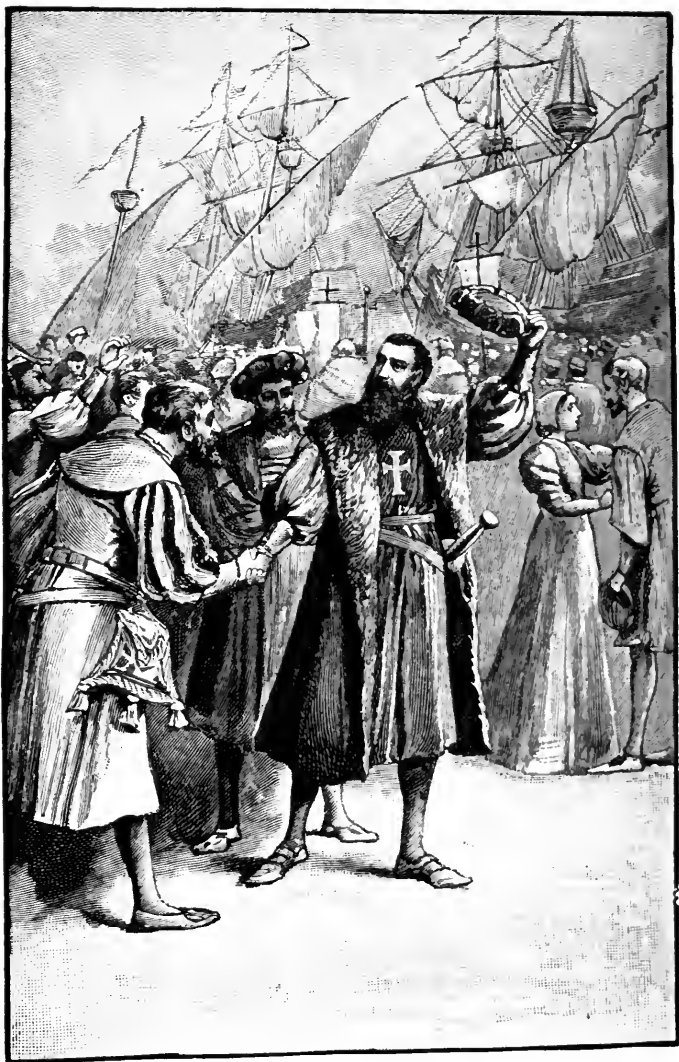
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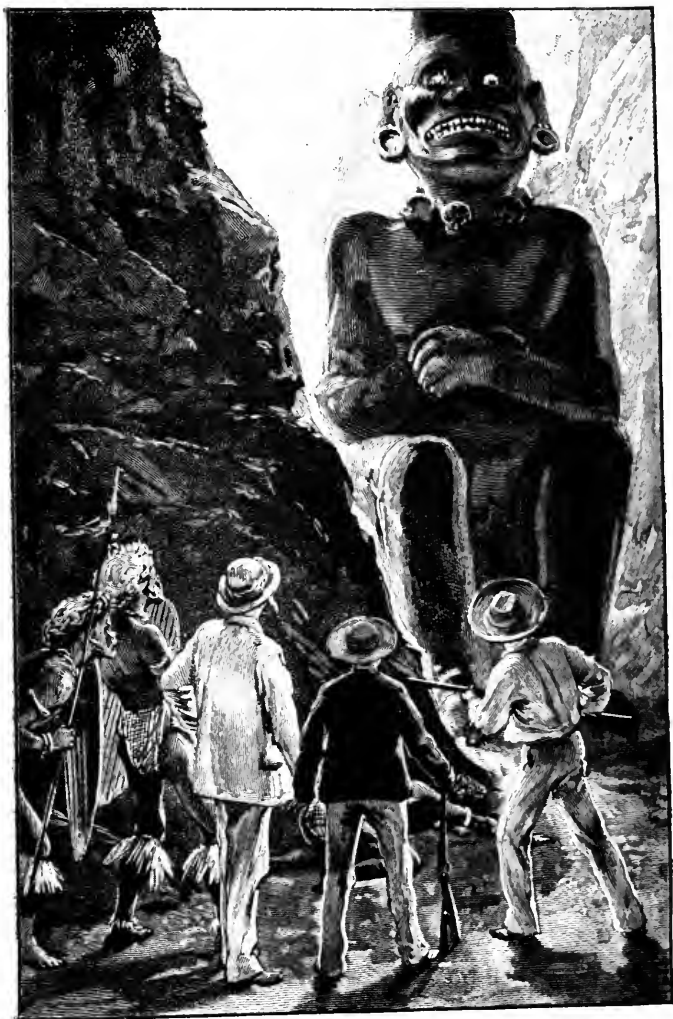
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